192 Pages

02648

AUGUST 1979

$1.25

UK 70p

# Isaac Asimov's



## SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

'Dreams' by Barry B. Longyear

Frederik Pohl

John M. Ford

ALEX SCHOMBURG

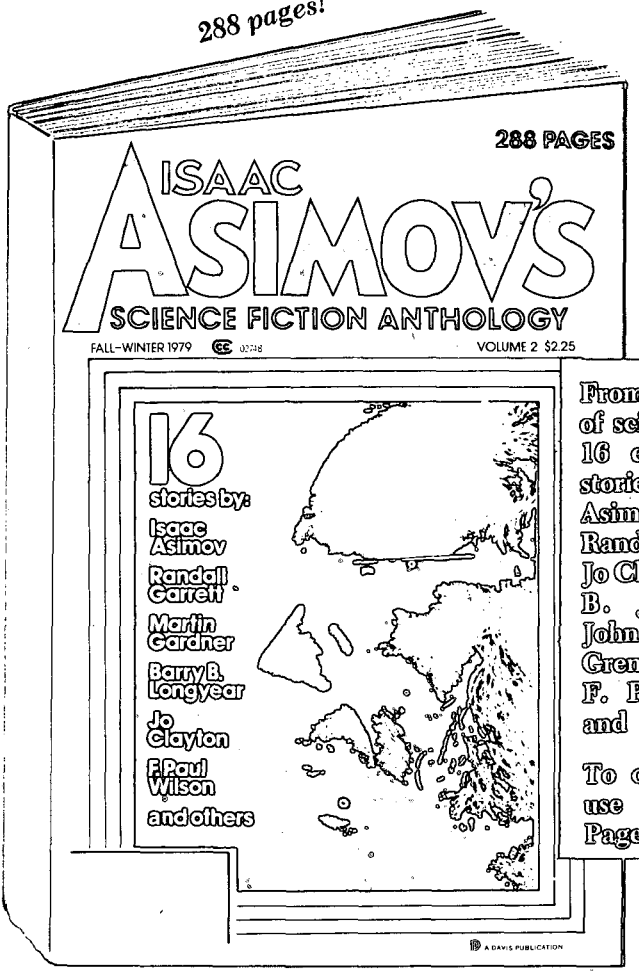
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

A DAVIS PUBLICATION

A Superb Collection

*of great stories from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine!*

288 pages!

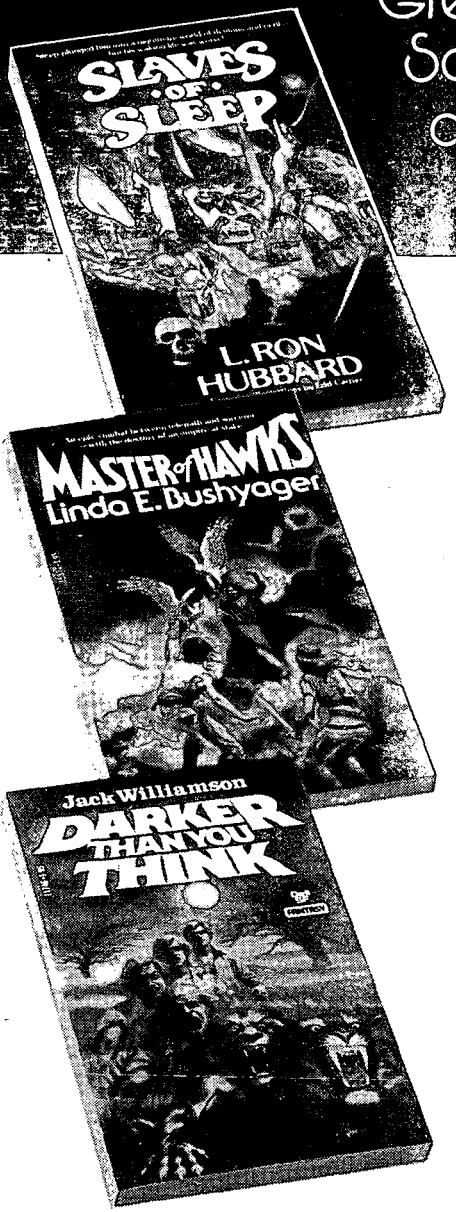



From the masters of science fiction, 16 entertaining stories by Isaac Asimov himself, Randall Garrett, Jo Clayton, Barry B. Longyear, John M. Ford, Grendel Briarton, F. Paul Wilson, and many more.

To order, please use coupon on Page 18.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Great New Science Fiction and Fantasy from Dell




## SLAVES OF SLEEP
*by L. Ron Hubbard* $1.75

A swashbuckling adventure. Features the original illustrations by Edd Cartier.

## MASTER OF HAWKS
*by Linda E. Bushyager* $1.95

An epic fantasy adventure of combat between telepath and sorcerer. The first in a series of fantasies about mythical kingdoms.

## DARKER THAN YOU THINK
*by Jack Williamson* $1.95

One of the great werewolf stories of all time, from one of the great SF writers of all time!

Dell SF

Dell Publishing Co., Inc. • 1 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza • New York, N.Y. 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Isaac Asimov's® SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Next issue on sale
23 August 1979

POSTMASTER:
send form 3579 to IAsfm,
Box 1855 GPO, New York, NY 10001

ISSN 0162-2188
Vol. 3, No. 8 (whole no. 18) August 1979

COVER, "Dreams" ..... Alex Schomburg 1
EDITORIAL: LEARNING DEVICE ..... Isaac Asimov 5
ON BOOKS ..... Baird Searles 12
Dreams ..... Barry B. Longyear 22
The Explosion of Blabbage's Oracle ..... Martin Gardner 43
ALEX SCHOMBURG ..... Shawna McCarthy 44
C.O.D. ..... Jonathan Milos 49
Stone Crucible ..... John M. Ford 56
ON WHAT REALLY GOES ON AT A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION ..... Darrell Schweitzer 78
SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR ..... Erwin S. Strauss 81
Itch on the Bull Run ..... Sharon Webb 82
The Migration of Darkness ..... Peter Payack 93
Where Are You, Stephanie Tobin? ..... Juleen Brantingham 94
Doo-Dah Chemistry ..... William Tuning 103
The Cool War ..... Frederik Pohl 104

**Joel Davis:** President & Publisher **Isaac Asimov:** Editorial Director
**George H. Scithers:** Editor

Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.25 a copy; annual subscription of twelve issues $15.00 in the United States and U.S. possessions; in all other countries $17.00. Address for subscriptions and all correspondence about them: Box 1855 GPO, New York, 10001. Address for all editorial matters: Box 13116, Philadelphia, PA 19101. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1979 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and additional offices.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# EDITORIAL: LEARNING DEVICE

## by Isaac Asimov

**art: Frank Kelly Freas**

When Hugo Gernsback first originated magazine science fiction over half a century ago, he considered its purpose that of prediction and education. He may have been serious about its predictive value, for he was a terrific futurist of gadgets (none better, I think). Even late in life, he would, at Christmas time, distribute small booklets in which he would include his latest foresights into the world of future technology.

I believe he was also sincere in feeling science fiction to be of educational value; but I know that he was a shrewd promoter, and there may have been more to it than that. He must have known that the new magazines were bound to be considered sensational nonsense and that parents and teachers would try to keep the younvsters in their charge from reading them. It was only natural, then, that he try to cast a pall of respectability over the stuff.

(After all, my father wouldn't let me read sensational literature; and I got him to make an exception in the case of science fiction only by stressing the learning value of its content of science.)

One way in which Gernsback tried to establish the educational value of science fiction was by running a science quiz in each issue in those early days, with a page reference for finding the answer. (What is the nearest star?—page 29). If you looked up the page reference you would find the answer. ("But, captain, those vicious pirates have dragged the fair Ilanadee to their lair on the planet Xybu, which circles Alpha Centauri, the nearest star.")

Those science quizzes drove me crazy. I was nine years old when I persuaded my father that science fiction would educate me, and there were indeed some things I had not yet learned about science, so the questions in the science quiz had the potentiality of intriguing me. What *was* the nearest star? I might ask myself.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The trouble was that if I allowed my curiosity to force me to turn to page 29, I sometimes had to read the entire page to find the answer; and that would tend to kill the story for me. I would find out that the fair Ilanadee had been dragged off to the pirate lair (for who knew what fell purpose, and I certainly didn't), and I didn't want to know that in advance.

On the other hand, if I waited till I had read all the stories, the uestions no longer interested me. I had the answers.

So you can bet we'll never have a science quiz in this magazine, at least not one that is seriously intended as such. (If any reader wants to send in a science quiz that is a genuinely clever satire, I'm sure George will consider it; but even that is not likely to work more than once in a long while.)

There are additional problems to the notion of science fiction as a learning device.

First, science advances and science fiction writers sometimes lag behind.

Back in 1940, I referred to element 43 as "masurium" in a story I had written. However, the discovery of masurium, reported in 1925, proved a false alarm. When element 43 was really discovered (it had to be formed in the laboratory actually, since all its isotopes are radioactive) it was named "technetium." The embarrassing point was that the real discovery was made in 1937, three years before I had written the story, but the news hadn't caught up to me yet.

Of course, in the good old days there was nothing as evanescent as a science fiction story. Here today and gone next month forever, except in the yellowing files of the more ardent science fiction fans. If you made a mistake, it was quickly gone; and the damage was fleeting.

Nowadays, on the other hand, science fiction stories can live on for many years. My Foundation stories, for instance, have been before the public and readily available for nearly thirty years now, more or less continuously, and bear considerable promise of outliving their author.

There are sins of omission in them that become more glaring by the decade. My Foundation stories span the Galaxy in detail, and yet nowhere do I mention quasars, pulsars, or black holes. To be sure, none of these objects were known in the 1940s when I wrote the stories; but I'm still uneasy about it.

As for sins of commission, consider my six books about Lucky Starr. Each of them is set in a different world of the Solar system,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and I did my best to describe those worlds accurately. Those books were written in the 1950s, however, and I described them accurately only as far as the astronomers of the 1950s knew.

Unfortunately for me, the 1950s saw us on the verge of the Space Age; and, what with radar astronomy, satellites, and space probes, there was a revolution in our knowledge of the Solar system, and virtually every world in it turned upside down and inside out.

Until the 1950s, as an example, it was taken for granted, and was virtually a science fictional convention, that Venus was a warm, waterlogged, primitive planet, similar to Earth in its dinosaur-ridden Mesozoic age. Why not? According to the nebular hypothesis of the origin of the Solar system, which held sway throughout the 19th century, the planets were formed from the outside in, so that Mars was considered older than Earth, and Venus was considered younger than Earth.

It made for excellent science fiction. If you wanted an advanced, decadent, dying civilization, you went to Mars. If you wanted a primitive dangerous world you went to Venus. In *David Starr: Space Ranger,* I used the former; in *Lucky Starr and the Oceans of Venus,* I used the latter.

In the Venus book, particularly, I went to town. I had a world-

MOVING? For your subscription to *IA'sf* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 1855 GPO, New York, NY 10001.

While we are always looking for new writers, please, before you send in a story, send us a stamped envelope, addressed to yourself, about 9½ inches long (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope). In it we will send you a description of our story needs and a discussion of manuscript format. The address for this and for all manuscript submissions is Box 13116, Philadelphia, PA 19101. We assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

**Joel Davis:** President & Publisher **Isaac Asimov:** Editorial Director
**George H. Scithers:** Editor **Shawna McCarthy:** Associate Editor
**Meg Phillips & Darrell Schweitzer:** Asst. Eds.
**Victor C. Stabile:** Vice Pres. & Treas. **Leonard F. Pinto:** Vice Pres. & General Mgr.
**Robert B. Enlow:** Sub. Cir. & Mktg. Dir. **Don L. Gabree:** Newsstand Cir. Dir.
**Jim Cappello:** Advertising Mgr. **Constance DiRienzo:** Rights & Permissions Mgr.
**Eugene S. Slawson:** Sub. Cir. Mgr. **Irving Bernstein:** Art Dir.
**Carl Bartee:** Prod. Dir.



LICENSED TO IA.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wide ocean filled with all kinds of interesting creatures, and Lucky had terrific adventures there with something that was rather like a mile-wide jellyfish.

Within just a few years after the appearance of the book in 1954, it turned out our notions of Venus were all wrong. It proved to be a nearly red-hot planet without a drop of surface water, with poisonous clouds, with virtually no rotation, but with gale winds, and so on.

Well, the Lucky Starr books are still in print, both in hard cover (Gregg Press) and soft cover (Fawcett); but in recent editions, I've had to insist on the publishers including introductory notes in which I bring the readers up-to-date on planetary conditions and explain that the books were written before present-day knowledge of the planets was established. It doesn't seem to hurt the sales; and even if it did, I wouldn't care. I can't mislead young readers, nor can I have them think I am a quarter-century behind in my knowledge of the Solar system.

Am I saying, then, that science fiction is useless as an educational device?

It may sound like it, so far; but I am not. All I am saying is that it is untrustworthy as a source of "facts," since these may be wrong, or at least out-of-date. There is nothing wrong, however, with science fiction as a way of arousing interest in science.

There, at least, it doesn't matter whether the scientific background of a science fiction story is accidentally wrong through ignorance, deliberately wrong through the exigencies of the plot, or simply out-of-date through the progress in science. If the story is *interesting,* it can be used.

Let us suppose, for instance, that you have a junior high school class or a young boy-scout troop, to whom, for some reason, you want to transmit an understanding of the planet, Venus. You may feel that they are not particularly interested in learning about Venus.

You therefore give them *Lucky Starr and the Oceans of Venus* to read; and we can suppose, for the purpose of argument, that they find it interesting and are enthusiastic about it. You may then pose them questions like:

Do you think it makes sense to suppose that Venus has a world-wide ocean? Why?

Scientists have found that Venus has a surface temperature of over 600° F. What do you suppose causes that? How do you suppose they found out? What happens to the ocean Asimov said Venus had?

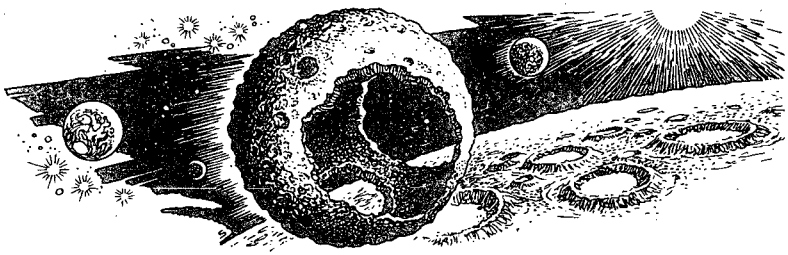


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—And so on.

I'm quite willing to bet that youngsters would be far more eager to talk about Venus after they have enjoyed a story about it—even a story about an out-of-date Venus—than before.

And *that's* the educational value of science fiction; that is what makes it a learning device. It stimulates curiosity and the desire to know.



Note From The Editor

*You may have noticed by now that we're missing our letters column this month, and you may be wondering if this is going to be a permanent omission. Let me assure you that this is not the case. We are just as interested as ever in your opinions of our magazine, and we intend to publish as many letters as we can. It's just that in this month's issue, we have a story of greater-than-average length: Fred Pohl's "The Cool War." We felt that this story deserved to be presented to you in its entirety, but on the other hand, that you deserved to receive a well-balanced issue. By dropping this month's letters, we saved approximately 10 pages, which we've used to present more short stories. We hope you'll agree with our decision.*

*—George H. Scithers*



LICENSED TO NNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Turn your words into money.

**Discover the writing and marketing techniques successful writers use. These informative books for writers make learning about writing as pleasant as . . . well, curling up with a good book. So look through the descriptions below and pick out a good book or two now. It's bound to help you.**

**Writing and Selling Science Fiction**
*compiled by the Science Fiction Writers of America*
Jerry Pournelle, James Gunn, Poul Anderson and others give valuable advice on markets, characters, dialog, "crazy" ideas, world-building, alien-building, and more. **8.95**

**The Mystery Writer's Handbook**
*by the Mystery Writers of America*
The mystery has disappeared from mystery writing. Learn the tricks of the trade—how to make the tension mount, how to make your reader turn the page. And how to keep him unaware of "whodunit." **8.95**

**The Writer's Resource Guide**
*edited by William Brohaugh*
Information: who's got it, how to get it, and how to use it. Almost 2,000 sources of free research material. **11.95**

**1001 Article Ideas**
*by Frank A. Dickson*
A professional writer gives you a brainstorm dispenser and idea machine—you'll never run dry with this book on your shelf! **10.95**

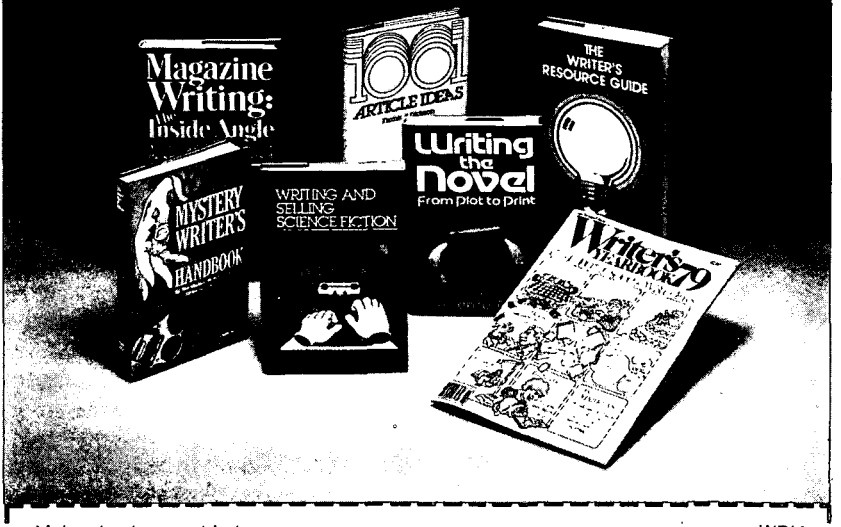
**Magazine Writing: The Inside Angle**
*by Art Spikol*
A successful magazine editor and writer tells you how to write and sell to the booming magazine market! **10.95**

**Writing the Novel: From Plot to Print**
*by Lawrence Block*
A popular novelist takes you through writing a novel step-by-step. Invaluable advice for beginners from a real pro. **10.95**

**1979 Writer's Yearbook**
The bestselling annual magazine for writers tells you what's hot and who's hot. Plus hundreds of the latest and best paying markets for writers today. **2.50**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## Choose from these books on writing to help you turn your interests into extra income!


Magazine Writing: The Inside Angle
100 ARTICLE IDEAS
THE WRITER'S RESOURCE GUIDE
Writing the Novel From Plot to Print
MYSTERY WRITER'S HANDBOOK
WRITING AND SELLING SCIENCE FICTION
Writer's YEARBOOK '79

Make checks payable to: WDIA

**Writer's Digest Books** 9933 Alliance Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45242

☐ YES! Please rush me the following books:

☐ Writing and Selling Science Fiction, $8.95
☐ The Mystery Writer's Handbook, $8.95
☐ The Writer's Resource Guide, $11.95
☐ 1001 Article Ideas, $10.95
☐ Magazine Writing: The Inside Angle, $10.95
☐ Writing the Novel: Plot to Print, $10.95
☐ 1979 Writer's Yearbook, $2.50

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Master Charge ☐ Visa

Acct. #_____ Interbank # _____

Signature_____

(Please include $1.00 postage and handling for 1-2 books plus 25c for each additional book. We cannot accept personal charge orders. Allow 30 days for delivery.)

Name _____

Address _____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ON BOOKS
## by Baird Searles

*The Two Faces of Tomorrow* by James P. Hogan, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
*The Drawing of the Dark* by Tim Powers, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
*Mindsong* by Joan Cox, Avon Books, $2.25 (paper).
*Daughter of the Bright Moon* by Lynn Abbey, Sunridge Press, $10.95 (cloth) $6.95 (paper).
*The Fourth Book of Virgil Finlay,* Gerry de la Ree, $15.50.

With only a couple of novels, James P. Hogan has established himself as a writer of great popularity. The publicity blat for his newest, *The Two Faces of Tomorrow,* describes it as his "breakout novel." Now, I'm not sure what that means or what he's breaking out of, but it's a good novel, and it's worth putting up with some serious flaws.

There is no way of avoiding the fact that it brings to mind Hal, Colossus & Co.; i.e. the computer that Takes Over. But Hogan has found a fresh approach to this theme that has threatened to become a cliché within a decade.

It takes place in the next century, a period of Clarkesque peace, prosperity, and dependence on computer systems to move things around and generally work out problems. Suddenly this system of systems does something naughty: to solve a problem (demolishing a small ridge on the Moon) it takes a short cut that nearly kills several humans.

It seems that an advanced factor introduced into the system is responsible. Therefore, a project working on an even more advanced factor, that of teaching a computer system judgement—as a human being is taught, by experience—comes close to being terminated. The director of this project suggests that one of the space stations now being built as colonies be revamped into a mini-Earth, run by a computer system with a built-in survival instinct. Then let it be threatened (by such things as periodic shut-downs), see how it reacts, and learn how to avoid a global disaster.

This is done, complete with a large group of mixed volunteers. Well, you guessed it: baby learns a lot faster than expected and all hell breaks loose.

A good deal of suspense is engendered here, and I will say nothing



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more as to what happens; I, for one, was in doubt as to the outcome until close to the end.

What makes this novel different from the others is that you are not given an artificial entity. *Spartacus,* as the system is called (and there are overtones to that), is literally a *system*; and the reader is shown its development as it occurs, as breakthrough after breakthrough toward consciousness is brought about.

This makes for extreme realism; unfortunately, the flaws I mentioned are the other side of this. Hogan spends about the first hundred pages of the book setting up his technological ambience with social/military/political ramifications; and, as a non-techie, I came near to bogging down. Technical realism is necessary to the process of fooling the science fiction reader into believing the improbable/impossible is true, but one of the finer points of being an SF writer is to be able to do this while getting on with the story. The absolute master of this is Arthur C. Clarke; I described the setting of *The Two Faces of Tomorrow* as Clarkesque, but Hogan has something to learn from Clarke about convincing us without a treatise.

Nevertheless, once you get into it, it's a prime piece of science fiction.

*The Drawing of the Dark* by Tim Powers is one of the most preposterous books I've ever read. Don't get me wrong; preposterousness is not necessarily a negative quality. But how else can you describe an Arthurian fantasy that takes place at the seige of Vienna in 1529? (For those of you shaky on dates, that's about a millennium after the Arthurian period.) It presents the reviewer with an ethical problem, being so full of little surprises that he doesn't want to say much about it for fear of spoiling the fun.

For instance, the title. Seems fairly ordinary, doesn't it: one of those pretentious meaningless phrases that implies wizardry and evil powers and so on. Wrong. I just hope your smile is as broad as mine was when I discovered what it really refers to.

I *will* toss about a few teasers. History buffs may remember that the 1529 siege of Vienna was one of the major confrontations between East and West. (The besiegers were the Turks.) Powers makes use of some historical characters such as the Hungarian turncoat, John Zapolya, as well as a crew of extremely out-of-date Vikings who get their dragonship stuck in the Donau Canal, a fight with winged afrits in the Vienna Woods, and an old soldiering song called "Saint Ursula Going Down for the Third Time."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Powers's writing is smooth, lively, and lighthearted; his characters are idiosyncratic and memorable. The combination of ongoing good humor and impressively in-depth historical knowledge brings to mind that classic two-headed writer, de Camp and Pratt. It's about time their successor turned up.

Joan Cox's *Mindsong* starts deceptively simply, on a world that could be a post-holocaust Earth populated by pastoral tribes that variously war on and trade with each other. DonEel is about to be executed by the religious elements of his village for a moral infraction, and is rescued by a stranger from Delpha, a community that specializes in teaching and mediating among the tribes.

DonEel and the stranger, Pollo, establish a strange rapport which is partly sexual, which does not prevent DonEel from becoming involved with Pollo's sister; he is also entangled in the complicated political intrigue among the tribes which seems to be getting rapidly out of hand due to unknown factors.

In an old mine, DonEel is forced into what turns out to be a matter transmitter, and utter confusion sets in. Nothing on DonEel's world is what it seems, and Cox throws a complexity of alien worlds, alien races, and alien characters at the reader which clouds the narrative irrevocably; there seems enough material here for three novels. She has no lack of writing abilities; this is demonstrated by the opening of the novel, various subsequent scenes, and some interestingly conceived characters. But please, Ms. Cox, give your reader a little more help as to who is doing what and with which and to whom.

There seems to be developing a subgenre of fantasy which might be called the warrior-priestess epic, tales of the inevitably beautiful heroine, waving a sword in one hand and a wand (or jewel, or some variety of talismanic object) in the other. In addition to her beauty, she has Powers, and a Destiny. There is often a telepathic animal around to talk to, since she disdains men; but after a variety of hair-raising adventures, she finally meets one who is not only her equal in arms, but a good conversationalist, too; and they live happily ever after when she gets through with defeating the sorcerer.

This lady is fun, but she is threatening to become a bore. Lynn Abbey's *Daughter of the Bright Moon* isn't, quite. Her world is one of medieval culture and two moons (a bright one and a dark one—guess which is on whose side?), her telepathic animal is a feisty, horned war-horse, and she hates learning folk dances. In


LICENSED TO SRZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*To: Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*
*P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Conn. 06835*

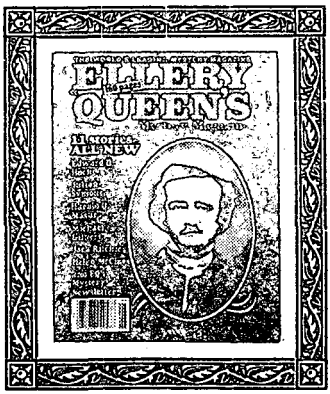
☐ Bill me $6.97 for 6 issues (outside U.S.A. & poss., $8.00)
☐ Enclosed is $6.97, which entitles me to ONE BONUS ISSUE (7 in all) for paying now (outside U.S.A. & poss., $8.00)
I prefer to enclose payment or to use my MASTER CHARGE or VISA credit card for the long-term offer below:
☐ Enclosed is $13.94 for 14 issues (outside U.S.A. $18.66)
H9G025

Credit Card #_____
Expiration Date_____ Signature_____
Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue

Name (please print)_____
Address_____
City_____ State_____ Zip_____

*Special offer for new subscribers only*

*7 months of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, for a saving of $1.78*




*or 14 months doubles savings $3.56 over the regular subscription rate.*

**SO MUCH GREAT READING FOR SUCH A LOW PRICE!**

This money-saving offer brings you up to 14 exciting monthly issues, delivered to your doorstep.
Each monthly issue is a rich, 160-page anthology—averaging 12 new stories never before published—and occasionally a distinguished reprint. By such masters as Rex Stout, Georges Simenon, Dick Francis, Michael Gilbert, John Ball, Isaac Asimov, Brian Garfield and Edward D. Hoch.

*The most widely read mystery magazine in the world!*


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

addition to the two moons, there are other godlike powers that push people and events around. There is an inspired moment with one of them, a now-you-see-him, now-you-don't reptilian sort who is endearingly blasé about the whole course of events. I could have done without the final confrontation, in which our warrior priestess and the evil sorcerer throw around energy like a Pennsylvania power plant, but I guess it's *de rigeur,* and until then it galumphs along nicely.

One of the joys of the Magazine Age of SF (the '40s in particular, aka the Golden Age) was the fact that you were monthly getting all this good stuff *illustrated,* with luck by such masters of pulp art as Virgil Finlay and Hannes Bok. The noted collector and publisher of collectors' editions, Gerry de la Ree, has now given us *The Fourth Book of Virgil Finlay.*

Even knowing Finlay's prolificacy and the staggering extent of de la Ree's collection of his works, I was wondering if the high quality of the first three could be maintained. No fear; it's a beautiful collection. Here are illustrations for stories by Bradley, Clarke, Ballard, and Silverberg, among others, featuring the bubbles, wings, and starburts that were Finlay's trademarks, and the machines, robots, and humans of unearthly beauty that made up his peerless artwork.

Of particular interest are ten of the twenty drawings he did for *The Complete Book of Space Travel,* published in 1956 and now a collector's item.

Do we, like Oliver Twist dare push our luck and ask for more? A fifth book of Virgil Finlay, please?

## ON MORE BOOKS

**by Charles N. Brown**

---

*Watchtower* by Elizabeth A. Lynn; Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 251pp, $9.95 (hardcover).

*Stardance* by Spider & Jeanne Robinson; Dial, 1979, 220pp, $7.95 (hardcover).

*Destination: Void* by Frank Herbert; Berkley, 1978, 276pp, $1.95 (paper).

*The Jesus Incident* by Frank Herbert & Bill Ransom; Berkley/Putnam, 1979, 337pp, $9.95 (hardcover).



LICENSED TO NYZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*The Best of Avram Davidson* edited by Michael Kurland; Doubleday, 1979, 210pp, $7.95 (hardcover).
*They* edited by R. Reginald & Douglas Menville; Arno, 1978, 575pp, $37.00 (hardcover).
*King Solomon's Children* edited by R. Reginald & Douglas Menville; Arno, 1978, 558pp, $37.00 (hardcover).
*The King of Kor* by Sidney J. Marshall; Arno, 1978, 258pp, $16.00 (hardcover).
*The Fox Woman & Other Stories* by A. Merritt, Arno, 1978, 205pp, $12.00 (hardcover).
*Bibliography of Adventure* by Bradford M. Day, Arno, 1978, 125pp, $12.00 (hardcover).

The 1978 Nebula nominees were announced in late January. The novel nominees were *Dreamsnake* by Vonda N. McIntyre, *The Faded Sun: Kesrith* by C.J. Cherryh, *Blind Voices* by Tom Reamy, *Strangers* by Gardner Dozois, and *Kalki* by Gore Vidal. I reviewed the first four in earlier columns and liked *Blind Voices,* a Bradburyesque fantasy, the best. *Dreamsnake* started out well enough, but had a trite ending. *The Faded Sun: Kesrith* is only the first third of a novel and has no ending at all. *Strangers* has some fine writing, some weak plotting, and is much too derivative of Farmer's classic of the fifties, *The Lovers.* I didn't review *Kalki* at all the first time around because I couldn't finish it. The Nebula winners will be announced in late April. Although I prefer *Blind Voices, Dreamsnake,* a more popular book, will probably win.

*(Editor's note—Nebula winners were: Best Novel:* Dreamsnake *by Vonda N. McIntyre. Best Novella: "The Persistance of Vision" by John Varley. Best Novelette: "A Glow of Candles, A Unicorn's Eye" by Charles L. Grant. Best Short Story: "Stone" by Edward Bryant.)*

The science fiction field is an arbitrary field in that it contains many books which are not science fiction in content, but which publishers think will appeal to a science fiction audience. Thus, heroic fantasy, sword & sorcery, horror stories, etc., are frequently published or marketed under the science fiction umbrella even though the very word "science" may be completely foreign to their subject.

*Watchtower* by Elizabeth A. Lynn is an excellent book, but is not really science fiction or even fantasy. It's an historical novel set in a medieval world which never actually existed. There is no magic


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HOW TO ORDER—IT'S SPANKING NEW!

Asimov's SF Adventure Magazine

380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Chock-full of stories with lots of illustrations—
the Fall '79 edition will provide you SF excitement and fun!

☐ Enclosed is $1.95 plus 45¢ handling/shipping
(total of $2.40) for the Fall '79 issue (#4) of
ASIMOV'S SF ADVENTURE Magazine.

Name _____
please print

Address _____ Apt. No. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

IASFM89

FOR MORE DETAILS SEE AD ON COVER 3

HOW TO ORDER—ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGY NO. 2

(See Cover II of this issue for a picture of the Anthology)

That's right, if you missed some of the first issues of ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, you'll enjoy this superb collection of 16 stories by the masters of science fiction.

TO: ISAAC ASIMOV'S
SF ANTHOLOGY #2
380 LEXINGTON AVE.
NYC NY 10017

☐ Enclosed is $2.25 plus 65 cents handling/shipping (total of $2.90) for Asimov's SF Anthology #2

IASFM89

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

involved. Nevertheless, Lynn is considered a science fiction writer, the book has been published as part of the Berkley science fiction line, and is being marketed to a science fiction audience. Confusing, isn't it?

*Watchtower* is the first volume of a trilogy about Tornor Keep, which at the beginning of the book has fallen to Col Istor, the semi-villain of this part of the series. Although there is a fair amount of action in the book, the main thrust is in characterization and description. The land of Arun is sketchy in general terms although the details are well done. The characters are well drawn and believable, and the writing, done in an economical style similar to that of Cecelia Holland, is excellent. *Watchtower* may not be science fiction, but it's worth your time and money.

The first quarter of *Stardance* by Spider and Jeanne Robinson was originally published as a novella. It won both the Nebula and Hugo Awards for 1977. The other three quarters appeared as an *Analog* serial last year. The short version, an attempt to fuse science fiction with modern dance, was quite successful. The longer section starts out as more of the same, but gradually gets more ambitious and less coherent. The Robinsons, unfortunately, wrote the second half with more enthusiasm than skill.

*The Jesus Incident*, by Frank Herbert and Bill Ransom, is a sequel to Herbert's earlier novel, *Destination: Void.* Herbert has also produced a revised version of the first novel. *Destination: Void* is a philosophical discussion on the nature of consciousness disguised as a novel. *The Jesus Incident* is a philosophical discussion on the nature of religion disguised as a novel. Both books are dull and talky despite Herbert's attempt to hide the talk with action and tension. I read them both all the way through; but it was a chore, not a pleasure. To reach its correct audience, *The Jesus Incident* should have been bound in imitation leather and sold as a sequel to the Bible.

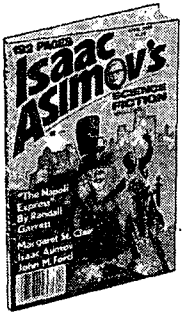
*The Best of Avram Davidson* edited by Michael Kurland should actually be titled *Twelve Avram Davidson Stories of Varying Quality Picked by Michael Kurland Who Also Wrote the Superfluous Introduction,* but it probably wouldn't fit on the spine or appeal to readers as much as the present title. Avram Davidson is a great short story writer. He has written such classics as "The Sources of the Nile," "Help! I Am Dr. Morris Goldpepper," and "What Strange Stars and Skies." All of these are in this excellent collection.

Arno Press has issued a 69-volume set of lost-race and fantasy-fiction books, mostly first published in the late nineteenth or early

LICENSED TO UNZ ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twentieth century. The series is edited by R. Reginald and Douglas Menville. I'm a fan of H. Rider Haggard and was delighted to finally get copies of some of the rare parodies of Haggard's work. *They* contains three parodies of Haggard's *She* plus an informative introduction by R. Reginald. *King Solomon's Children* has two parodies of *King Solomon's Mines* plus one of *Jess*. *The King of Kor* by Sidney J. Marshall is not a parody, but a sequel to *She* (Haggard himself wrote three such sequels). As I said, I was delighted to finally have these. I was not so delighted when I tried to read them since the writing is just awful. More to my taste was a hardcover reprint of *The Fox Woman and Other Stories*, a complete collection of the short stories of A. Merritt, and *Bibliography of Adventure* by Bradford M. Day, a bibliography of the adventure fiction of Talbot Mundy, H. Rider Haggard, Sax Rohmer, and Edgar Rice Burroughs. The Day volume was especially welcome since it has only appeared before as a mimeographed pamphlet. The Burroughs and Rohmer bibliographies have been revised for this edition. All of the Arno Press volumes are beautifully bound and well produced. For a complete list of the series, write Arno Press, 3 Park Ave., New York NY 10016.


*Now Monthly*




**ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE**
**Box 1855 GPO**
**NY, NY 10001**

**ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE**

***America's fastest-growing new SF magazine!***

☐ **Enclosed is $7.50 for 6 issues (outside USA & poss. $8.50)**

**I prefer to use my MASTER CHARGE or VISA credit card—however, only these longer terms are available:**

☐ **1 yr. (12 issues) $15.00**
☐ **2 yrs. (24 issues) $29.00**

**Credit card #**

**Expiration date** _____

**Signature** _____

**Name** _____

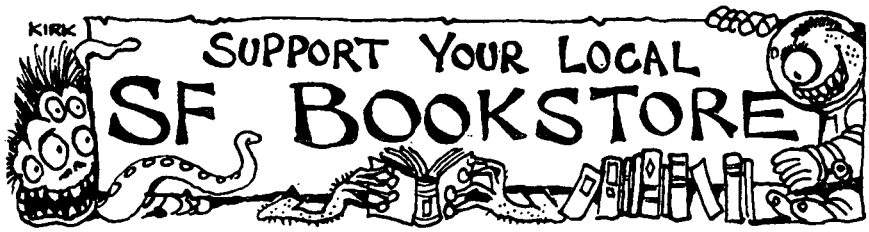
**Address** _____

**City** _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

**Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue.** **H9G041**




LICENSED TO SFNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




The rate per word for Classified Ads is $1.00 each insertion, minimum ad $15.00—payable in advance. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. Space reservations close 1st of 3rd month preceding COVER date. Send order & remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

### CALIFORNIA

THE OTHER CHANGE OF HOBBIT, 2433 Channing Way, BERKELEY. New, used and rare. (415) 848-0413.

WARRIORS, WIZARDS 'N ROBOTS, 10292 Westminster Avenue, GARDEN GROVE. Wednesday-Sunday, Noon-6.

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MOONSTONE BOOKCELLARS, INC., 2145 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., WASHINGTON. 202-659-2600. Open seven days 11AM—6PM.

### ENGLAND

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP, 57 Summer Row, BIRMINGHAM B31JJ. 10 AM till 6 PM. Phone (021) 236-1112 (Mailorder Service).

J. WELLINGTON WELLS, 70 St. Mary's Axe, LONDON. Daily, 6-11 pm.

"DARK THEY WERE AND GOLDEN-EYED." 9-12 St. Anne's Court, LONDON. 01-734-4260. Open Mon-Sat. The Largest Science Fiction Bookstore in the World.

A DREAMER'S TALES, Go-bye St & The Strand, LONDON. DRAx-1313.

### MARYLAND

EVERYTHING in SF and Fantasy. Send 50¢ for Big 1979 Catalog. Collections Also Purchased. Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Dr., Rockville, MD 20853.

### MASSACHUSETTES

MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE, College & Garrison Sts., ARKHAM. 7 pm to midnight.

### MICHIGAN

CURIOUS BOOK SHOP, 307 E. Grand River, E. LANSING. Midwest's Largest SF Selection! (517) 332-0112.

### NEHWON

THE SHOP OF SF SCROLLS, Inn of the Eel, Great West Road, LANKHMAR, (211) 555-1313.

### NEW YORK

FANTASY ARCHIVES, 71 8th Avenue, NEW YORK. Uncommon books. By appointment only. #929-5391.

THE SCIENCE FICTION SHOP, 56 Eighth Ave., N.Y., NY 10014. Virtually everything in print, and much that isn't. FREE catalogue.

NEBULUS BOOKS, 503 S. Geddes, SYRACUSE, 476-3414. Games, Pulps, Comics, Magazines, Books.

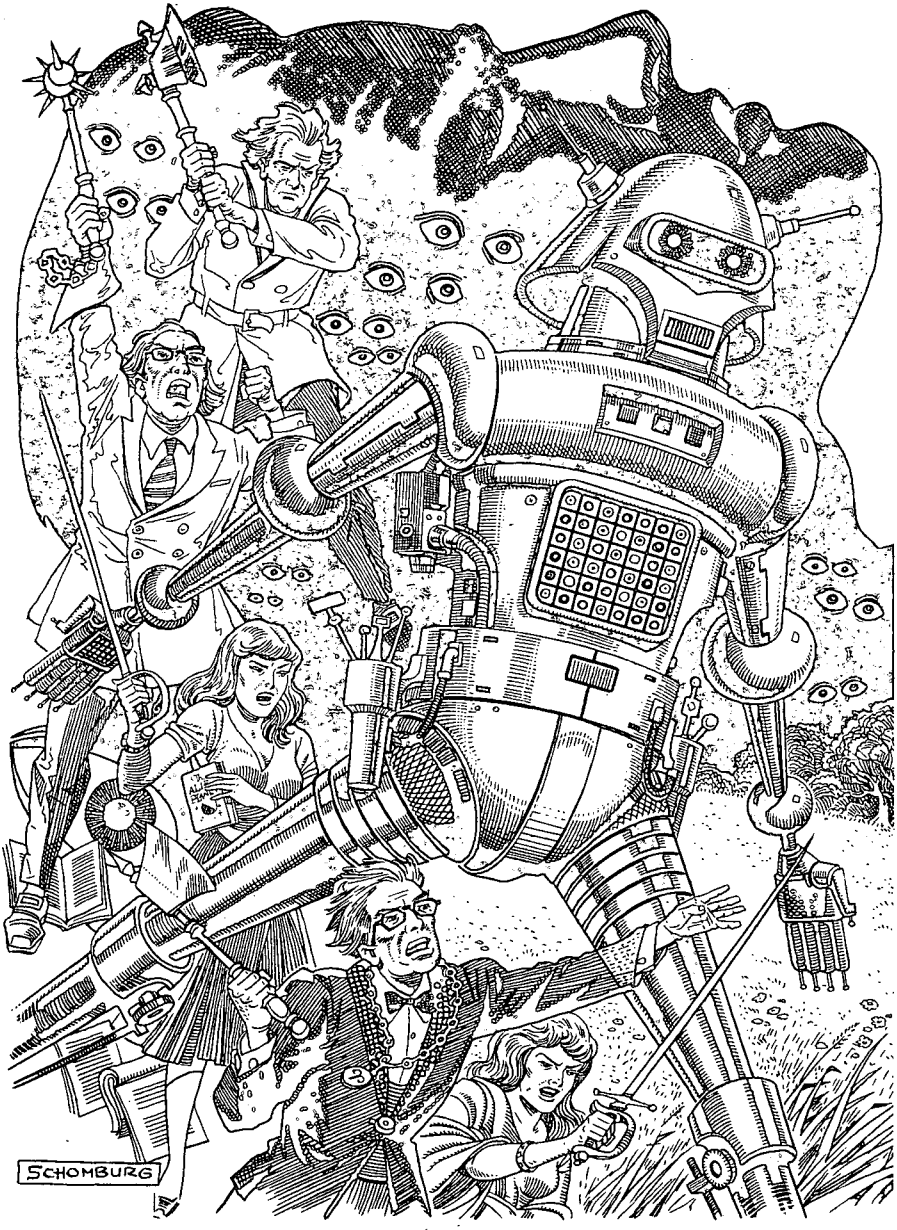
### UTAH

COSMIC AEROPLANE, 258 East 1st South, SALT LAKE. Open 10-9 Weekdays 2-7 Sunday. 533-9409.

### WASHINGTON

MAGAZINE CITY, 1315 Third Avenue, SEATTLE. 624-6084.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED






LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# DREAMS

## by Barry B. Longyear

art: Alex Schomburg

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*It's all the fault of James Gunn. When we asked Alex Schomburg to illustrate Gunn's recent article, "On the Road to Science Fiction . . . ," he did up a few extra color sketches for the cover. One of them was seen by Barry Longyear; the result is the following story.*

Some think I am insane. Would that my problems were that easily explained. Some people I know believe I am insane, although they point out that I am making quite a good living from being crazy. They don't understand. The things I write are not for money, although the money allows me to keep on going. No, the writing is how I let it out; how I try to piece together the events; how I try to sustain that one lousy, remaining thread I have to reality.

And now I sit here, staring at this damned form letter—this flip, semi-literate request for details of my personal and professional life, to introduce me to the reader. But I do not write for fun. That even less than for money, and certainly not to satisfy the curiosity of any person with a dollar and a quarter to waste and a few minutes of time to kill. But—I look at this bio request again and again. I can't hide from it, and I can't throw it away. What about me, it asks, and the things I feel well up inside me, clawing to be set free—given that peculiar life of ink on paper.

I thumb through a back copy to look at the authors' bios, and laugh. Twenty-, thirty-word lists of dry events attempting to be amusing through lame humor. I already have over two hundred, and I've hardly begun. But, if it's a rule—this thirty-word limit—I might as well break it. I've broken just about every other rule of writing. I don't read much—I never have. I don't plan anything, I don't revise, and I don't give a damn. I'll break another right now by telling you the ending of this tale first—two rules, in fact, since the ending is one that is *verboten*. "It was all a dream" is considered a cheap ending in fiction. Lewis Carroll can pull Alice's cookies out of Wonderland that way, but the rest of us are supposed to gimmick, slug, slash, or reason our way out. *Reason?* What a laugh. What a thigh-thumping, tear-rending *laugh*.

Let me sprinkle the pieces of my broken rule before you. They are dreams I have, yet . . . they are something else. They are where I have been, they are the experience I draw upon to write, they are nightmares to the nth power that let me meet the horrors all of you laugh off with the morning sun and try to describe to bored listeners


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the breakfast table. They are dreams, I am sure; that they are *nothing but* dreams, I cannot tell. No one can.

Let me tell you about when they started. It was three years ago. (My god, I almost said it was a dark and stormy night! Well, it *was*.) I had stumbled into bed about three in the morning, my sinuses packed from too much smoking, my stomach writhing from the bowl of chili I'd eaten at midnight, and my head slightly soggy from the several beers I'd used in an attempt to extinguish the chili. It had been one last attempt at saving a forty-thousand-word start on a novel that had kept me up. Soon after the novel expired, I did as well.

Helen had the covers wrapped around her head and was well through her second cord of wood. Snoring usually drives me to distraction, but that night I was asleep before I hit the pillow, and I mean *asleep*. Usually sleeping for me is a fitful state of semi-doze as I mentally thumb through bits of plot or dialog, discouraging events of the day, or particularly humiliating episodes of my youth. Many times, while I am "sleeping" in this manner, I will come wide awake with a story idea. Then it's another all-nighter while I try to get it on paper before I forget it. When I stretched out that night, however, I was blank. Then it started.

Whoever directs my dreams was trained by Orson Welles. Dramatic angles, startling contrasts, and deep shadows. I was in a roundish room with one continuous wall. There were doors in the wall spaced only a few inches apart, with swirling, black mists serving as curtains. In the center of the room, one of the black mists shaped itself into an irregular column, then opened its eyes. Eyes covered the column from top to bottom. Horrid, red-irised things. "Which door?" the column asked.

In my dreams I can usually tell that I'm dreaming. Lots of times, if I enjoy the premise, I'll go along just for the fun of it. If I don't want to play along, I can force myself to wake up. "All right. Wake up!"

A number of the eyes crowded together on my side of the black column. "We are awake. Which door?"

Without moving my legs, I was beginning to whirl around the wall, passing the doors in a blur. "Wake up! Wake up!"

"We are awake, for we never sleep. Which door?" Twice more I whirled around the room, heard the column say something about "random dimension"; and then I was walking at night on the boardwalk at Coney Island. There were no lights anywhere, and the place

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a shambles. Windows were boarded over, and scraps of paper skittered across deserted walkways. I don't remember the ocean being there, but I heard music—some of that incoherent jazz that I don't understand at all. I walked a little further, the wet night air making my face sticky; and I saw a light ahead.

I held my hand to my face, felt the moisture on it, then stopped. This was too real for one of my dreams. When I dream, the pictures I form, the things I experience, are remarkably devoid of detail. Feeling the moisture in the air and on my skin is the kind of detail my dreams never have. I stooped down and felt the boards under my feet. They were worn, and grains of sand rolled under my fingers. I picked up a splinter, then jerked up my hand and sucked on my finger.

As I squatted on the boardwalk, trying to catch the end of the splinter with my teeth, I kept asking myself "Why Coney Island?" I hadn't been there since I was a kid—twenty-five or more years ago. The bad-news novel I had been fighting with had nothing to do with Coney Island, and my chili dreams usually involve bug-eyed characters riding on snakes forming up a posse to come and get me. I looked at that light again, then stood and began walking toward it while that bleep-honk jazz got louder.

I stopped in front of an open doorway, a single naked bulb illuminating the entrance to what looked like a ride of some kind. Behind a counter stood a fat men in rough clothes chewing on the stub of a cigar. He looked at me. "Care to take a chance?"

I backed away from the door a little, then began wondering about the plot change. My dreams usually find me being driven through circumstance with no volition of my own. I want to get out—get free—but off I go into flame, disaster, off tall buildings or whatever. But in front of that cigar-chewing fat man, I knew I had a choice. If I wanted, I could turn around and go away. That puzzled me, because I never reflect in my dreams—I just experience. I looked at the fat man again, then stepped through the entrance. He smiled around his cigar, then pulled a ticket from a huge wheel. "That'll be fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars? You're out of your mind." Something compelled me to reach for my pockets just to see how much money I had. Money is something else I never have in my dreams. I reached in to my right side pocket and closed my fingers around a handful of paper. I pulled it out and counted the bills. "I only have thirty-seven dollars."

"Too bad."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Whaa—" the floor dropped out from underneath me, plunging me, first, into darkness; then as I hit a huge wooden sliding board, I was in a corkscrewed shaft lit with red, yellow, and green lights. I started falling over to one side, stuck out my hand to right myself, then withdrew it as the friction burnt my palm. I went over on my shoulder and decided the time was right. I began screaming. That was my sure-fire way to wake up from a dream, because even if my own noise didn't wake me up, it would wake up Helen. In turn, she would shake me until it was over.

The screams followed me down the giant corkscrew until the slide leveled out and deposited me in a huge wooden bowl. I came to a stop, took a few breaths, then looked around. There were seven others sitting in the bowl. One of them stood and walked over to me. "You're the eighth. I guess it begins now."

"Eighth what, and what begins?" I sat up, then pushed myself to my feet.

The one standing, a man dressed in a grey business suit, shrugged. "The game. I don't know anything more about it than that."

I took a chance. "Did you see that black thing, the one with all the red eyes?"

The man raised an eyebrow at me, then shook his head. "I wouldn't worry about it. You do know this is a dream, don't you?"

"Yeah, sure." I nodded, then smiled. "Yeah. It's good to hear someone say it, though."

"BEGIN!" At the boom of the signal, all of us were on our feet. The man I had been talking to looked up at the colored lights.

"Begin what?"

Swords, maces, and axes appeared in our hands. The axe in mine startled me so much I dropped it. I looked up at the lights. "What in the hell is this?"

"BEGIN!"

From above the lights began a rumbling, then soon all of us could see a shape descending, the outside of a bowl. A woman holding a sword stared at the shape, then looked down at me with wild eyes. "They're going to crush us! They're going to crush us, unless we fight it out!"

She brought the sword back over her head with both hands, then rushed at me. She brought the blade down, but I stepped to one side. The weight of the heavy blade pulled her off of her feet, and she fell on it. Then she was still. "SEVEN!"

I looked up at the bowl shape. It had slowed a little. When I looked down again, two couples were swinging it out on the side


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away from mine and two men were coming at me—one with an axe, the other with a mace. "Wake up, you two! This is only a dream!"

The one on the left brought up his axe. "Then it doesn't matter what we do."

I held up my axe. "Like hell, it doesn't!"

"SIX!"

I saw a body drop on the far side of the bowl. A woman dropped her sword and screamed as a man ran at her with an axe. I turned to face my two opponents, wondering why they were ganging up on me. Sooner or later they'd have to slug it out between themselves. "FIVE!"

The one with the mace swung at me with a vertical stroke, and I stepped aside and gave him a horizontal whack in the kidneys. His scream almost drowned out the signal caller. "FOUR!"

The guy with the axe came at me, but I'll be damed if I didn't recognize him. Roman something—Roman Janeway. Yes! Roman Janeway. The slimy, ignorant, two-faced . . . the others! I recognized them all. Martin, Wertzle, Simmons—all book critics. I looked at Janeway. "Janeway, don't you recognize me? It's me!"

Janeway hefted his axe. "Of course I recognize you. Why do you think I have this?"

I threw my axe at his face. "THREE!"

I bumped my head on something and fell to the floor of the bowl. When I looked up, I could see that the matching shape was only a few feet from crushing us—those that remained.

"TWO!"

I saw a body drop—Van Zandt from the *Times,* I think—then a second body, still on its feet, came at me. He was crouched down to avoid bumping his head on the shape. I grimaced and picked up Janeway's axe. The one coming for me was Bettnor from the *News,* and I knew from experience that there was no reasoning with Bettnor—not after his review of my first novel, there wasn't! At a crouch I moved toward him, but then slipped in a pool of blood. "Hah!" He rushed at me, swinging his axe. I rolled over as Bettnor sunk his blade into the wooden floor. I swung my axe at Bettnor's head.

"THE WINNAH!"

Again, I was in that circular room looking at that black column of red eyeballs. "Which door?"

"Home! I want to go home!"

". . . home!"

"Wake up! Come on, wake up!"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I opened my eyes and saw Helen staring down at me. She was on her knees shaking my arm. "Helen . . . Helen."

"No more chili for you, buster." She pointed at herself with her thumb. "I can't lie around here all day like you do. I have to punch a time clock. Now, go to sleep; and for God's sake quit eating before you go to bed!"

She stretched out, rolled over, and in a minute was again sawing wood. My pyjamas were drenched with sweat and I got up to put on a dry pair. After getting the fresh pair from the dresser, I went into the bathroom and turned on the light. Except for a wild look, the image in the mirror looked the same. I shucked my old pyjamas, then pulled on the bottoms of the fresh pair. As I thrust my arm through the right sleeve of the tops, I felt something jab my finger. I finished putting my tops on, then sucked at my finger. I remembered the splinter from the boardwalk. I swallowed and looked at my right palm. The heel of the hand had a friction burn. I spent the rest of the night drinking coffee.

Have you ever tried to tell a dream to someone? You wake up, realizing that you've just gone through an experience of incredible importance, then you try to convey the impact of the experience on someone. "That's something, but you should have seen the dream I had." And everything piddles away into unimportance. Helen was even less sympathetic.

"See these bags under my eyes? That's what I think of your damned dream!" She pointed at the wastebasket. "All of the cans of chili are in there."

"What if I just take them out?"

"I opened them first. Enjoy."

I pushed a piece of bacon around on my plate. "Helen, what if I saw a shrink?"

"You just want someone to humor you. Look, everybody knows you're crazy. If you want someone to humor you at fifty dollars an hour, pay me. I'll humor you."

Helen was going to work and, as usual, was taking the car. "All you do is write. What do you need a car for?"

"What if . . . what if I wanted to see someone?"

"Like a shrink."

"Yeah, like a shrink."

She leaned over and kissed me on my nose. "I can tell you everything a shrink would, and for free. You are totally off your bezonko.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now, get in your office and write another bestseller, poopsie. Mommy can't keep this show on the road all by herself."

I was beginning to get the impression that I wasn't being taken very seriously. I shuffled into my office, flopped down in my chair, and picked up the paper. For some reason, when I unfolded it, the headline caught my eye: **Seven Critics Brutally Murdered.**

Was it Descartes that didn't know whether he was awake or dreaming? I remember something like that from my one year of bone-head philosophy. I had assumed I was dreaming. But that was before finding out that all those critics had awakened from their dreams to find themselves dead. I couldn't get it out of my head. What if I had been responsible for the deaths of Bettnor, Janeway, the other one? But I didn't kill them all. Terrific. What a defense. You see, your honor, I only killed Janeway, Bettnor, and the other one. Somebody else killed the rest.

I had to talk to someone. The trouble with writing at home in La Suburbia is the lack of willing listeners within walking distance. Even the housewives were thinning out as they discovered that there was more to life than manufacturing babies and unplugging toilets. Gary Wertzle, my dentist, had a home office two blocks away; but he cost more than the shrink. Besides, he'd probably be up to his elbows in somebody's gold mine. The sole remaining member of the endangered housewife species, Claudia Fenner, was a block away; but I couldn't bring myself to endure another recitation of "My son the lawyer." As far as I'm concerned, her son the lawyer ought to be her son the convict.

David Ross wouldn't be out of school until three-thirty. In those rare moments when David wasn't mining his crop of blackheads, he studied to become an SF writer; and he had picked me as his mentor. This great honor was bestowed upon me because I was within walking distance of his house, "and none of those other guys ever answered my letters." Our relationship matured—I might even say flowered—when I found out that David was a whiz at doing research (something I hate) and was a walking reference shelf of current science fiction. I never read the stuff myself. His value to me? I told him once that I needed an FTL drive for one of my stories. In a week he had compiled, in terms that I could understand, all of the curently fashionable reasons why FTL is impossible, in addition to a breakdown of every FTL drive ever cooked up by every writer since the 1940s. I was thinking of adopting him.

It was while I was mulling over the paucity of my choices that


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the doorbell rang. I figured it was the mailman, and I sat at my desk and waited for the creep to leave. The Christmas before, his gaily decorated blackmail note suggested that the amount of mail I get left me in his debt. I told him what he could do with his note; and ever since my manuscripts and other mail show up ripped, soaking wet, or covered with suspicious, foot-print-sized marks. The bell rang twice more, and I got up and looked out of the window beside the door.

It wore an ankle-length overcoat and had a brown stocking cap pulled down over its ears, leaving scraps of black hair sticking out between the hat and coat collar. Under its left arm was a suspicious wad of papers. "Will you look at my story and tell me what's wrong with it? It'll probably bore you, but I'd really appreciate it."

"Why, young tyro, would I want to be bored?"

"I'm sure you don't. But can you tell me why it's boring?"

"Probably because you can't write. . . ."

I have these little flashes of conversations I'd wish I'd had. They help to pass the time. The bell rang again, and I moved to the door and opened it. "What?"

"I'm Tilly Winters."

"Chilly Winters? What is this, a joke?"

"Tilly. Tilly Winters. You said you wanted to see the manuscript I'd written based on the multi-dimensional idea I told you about."

"I did?" I frowned and looked down at the bundle of papers. My great aunt Fanny, it would take me all day to wade through it. "Kinda long, isn't it?"

It smiled. "Oh, these are all the drafts, in case you wanted to see how I developed the idea. I did twelve drafts."

The load on my heart eased, then a germ of memory began to announce itself. "Tilly . . . you're the one . . . the psych major I met at the con in . . . in . . ."

"Washington."

I nodded. Suddenly "it" became a qualified listener—or at least as qualified as anything else I could get. "Come in, come in."

Tilly Winters came through the door, pulling off cap and coat, transforming an it into a she. I took her cap and coat, put them over the back of a chair, then motioned for her to follow me into my office. She stopped in the doorway to my office, bugged her eyes and hung open her mouth. "Oh, this is just the way I had imagined it!"

I sat down at my desk. "Imagined what?"

"This office." She looked at me. "I've been a fan of yours for ever so long." She pointed at a chair. "May I sit down?" I nodded, then


LICENSED TO AMS.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

held out my hand for the manuscript.

"Just the final draft."

She pulled out a few sheets and handed them to me. Its title was "Dimensanaut." Bells went off and recollection stampeded its way into my awareness. I had been working on the idea of a traveler between dimensions when I had met Tilly at a con and she told me about her story idea. That forty-thousand word fizzle had been my result, and now here was Tilly's try. She had told me . . . about a dream she had. Black mists and red eyes. Yes! It had seemed vaguely familiar then, but that was before my trip to play chop-chop with the critics. I had three words of the opening sentence read, when she leaned on my desk. "What do you think?"

I looked up. "Tilly, do you jog?"

She frowned. "Yes, I do."

"Then take a few laps around the block. I can't read this with you hovering over me like a mother hen."

She smiled. "I'm sorry." She stood and left the room. I leaned back in my chair, put my feet on my desk, and began reading. When I put down the manuscript, I was soaked with sweat.

Tilly's experience was a trip through flowers, with golden boys and silver girls prancing to the strains of "Tiptoe Through The Tulips." In fact, her trip had no story possibilities whatsoever. The sweats came when her trip ended and she found herself in the round room with the black gas peeking at her with those red eyes. She came puffing and wheezing into my office, then flopped down in a chair. She actually *had* gone and lapped the block a few times. "Well . . . what do you think?"

I tapped the manuscript with my finger. "Did you take this from a dream?"

"Most of it. That business at the end, with the director sending people to different dimensions, was mostly made up. I remembered something like that, but it was pretty vague. Why?"

I shrugged. "Nothing . . . in your dream, did you see the director at the beginning of your trip?"

She shook her head. "It started in the flowers. But what about the story? Is it any good?"

I shrugged, then held out the papers. "You need conflict. Sally whatshername shows up in happyland, frolics around, then finds out that it was a trip to another dimension. She hasn't had to struggle to achieve anything. You need a guy in a black hat—something like that."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She stood up, snatched the papers from my hand, then stomped toward the door. "Good bye!"

I jumped up and ran around my desk. "Hey, wait! I was only—" The door slammed and Tilly Winters was gone. Back at my desk I cracked out my forty-thousand word flop. I leafed through the pages, then closed the thing and thought. The premise was that what everyone thought was dreaming was actually experiences in another dimension. Most people go to sleep, but then have a long blank period until they wake up in another dimension. My hero had figured out the gag and had found out that by remaining in a state of half-sleep, he got to visit with the thing that ran the show. My director was an oversized ant at the head of a magic tunnel—both complete fabrications. But, Tilly had seen the real director; and now, so had I. It couldn't be mere coincidence.

I nodded. I had been working hard on the manuscript before I went and hit the sack. I looked at my finger, then squeezed at the splinter. It popped out along with a little gob of pus. I nodded again, then began studying the portion of the novel concerned with meeting the director. The next time I was going to choose my door, and maybe ask Old Redeyes a question or two.

The black column opened its eyes. "Which door?"

I licked my lips. "I'll pick one. First, I want something."

"What?"

"Look, I can't get anyone to believe me about this. They think I'm dreaming."

"Everyone calls it dreaming."

"Look, I picked up a splinter the last time. I know where I got it, but Helen says I got it when I fixed the kitchen cabinet. But that means that I can bring back things."

"We must hurry. You are backing up the travelers. What do you want?"

"Give me something—anything—that I can take back with me to prove where I've been."

The black column snaked out a tendril that shot at my face and touched my left cheek. "Ouch!" I opened my eyes and Helen was sitting up, looking at me.

"Again? Are we going to have another night with you jumping around?"

I touched my cheek with my fingertips and could feel a lumpy area. Helen had rolled over and I shook her shoulder as I turned on the bedlamp. "Look. Look at this."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She half-turned, squinting against the light. "What did you do to your cheek?"

"I asked the director—the guy in my dream—to give me something to bring back. Well? Believe me now?"

Helen shook her head, then pulled the covers over her shoulder and turned away. "You are sick. Burn yourself like that just to make a point. You are a real sicko. Now, good night and shut up!" She reached out a hand and turned off the light.

I got up, went to the bathroom, turned on the light, and looked in the mirror. My cheek was bright red with a dime-sized welt in its center. I turned off the light and went back to bed. As I lay there, thinking, I decided that I'd have to bring back something that couldn't be explained away. I half-dozed, concentrating on again meeting the director.

Moments passed, then it opened its eyes. "Which door?"

"Mars. I want to go to Mars."

"You two better get down to the *Eagle VII*."

I turned from the port, with its view of the red planet, then nodded at the orbiter pilot. "Right, Skip." I looked over at my co-pilot for the *Eagle*. "Let's go, Hap."

I turned to my buckles and began releasing myself from the couch. In this dimension I was an astronaut; and I knew my two companions, as well as what I was doing. None of that panicky groping around in fogs with fanged things hot on my heels; none of that embarrassing silence where everyone waited for me to do whatever it was that they knew I should do, but that I did not. I slapped the armrest of the couch. Damned good, solid reality-dream this time. I pushed up from the couch, made my way to the rear hatch, and pulled my way into the *Eagle*. As I turned at the deck, Hap came in, closing both hatches behind him. As I began strapping myself into the swivel couch, Hap pulled himself down and began on his buckles. By the time he was finished I was three-quarters of the way through the separation check.

Hap completed his part, then we both leaned back as the countdown began. He looked over at me, looking a bit nervous. "Like a dream, isn't it?"

I nodded and smiled. "Sure is."

"I mean, like a *dream*."

I frowned. "Are you trying to tell me something, Hap?"

Hap shrugged, then rubbed his eyes. "I don't know. It's too late to scrub the mission now, so I'm going to get right to the point." He


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked at me. "Are you in dimension right now?"

This had to be a trick; another little game of Old Redeyes. "I'm not sure I get your meaning."

Hap studied my face until I turned away. "You get my meaning, all right! How did you get here?"

I twiddled my thumbs, then darted a glance at Hap. "I asked to go to Mars." That was safe. If worse came to worse, I could say that I had volunteered for the Mars mission.

Hap nodded. "Sure you did. What are you in your dimension?"

He was really closing in. Was he another dimensanaut trying to make sense out of all the bizzaro things that were going on? I took a chance. "I'm a writer. What about you?"

"I have a little souvenir shop in Miami Beach. You know, coral, shells, things like that."

"You sell sea shells by the seashore?"

Hap glared at me. "This is no time for lame jokes, buddy."

"Sorry." I looked at the elapsed time indicator. "You all settled in? We'll be going down soon."

He stretched out a hand. "Do you have any idea what we're getting ourselves into?"

"I don't know. But what I do know is that I'm going to walk all over Mars and bring back some of it."

"But what's down there? This reality is made up out of our minds."

"What are you talking about? Mars is Mars." I shook my head. "Don't you think you're getting a little excited about nothing, Hap?"

"From dimension to dimension there are differences. The traffic cop . . . what do you call the thing with all the eyes?"

"The director."

Hap nodded. "Yeah. Well there are billions—trillions of doors. More. Perhaps an infinite number. Each one an imaginable reality. That's how we get these dreams or dimensions. Something in us *wants* them."

"Hap, I can only think offhand of perhaps a thousand dreams that I'd rather not have had."

"Only part of you. Part of you wanted to explore a certain dimension—a dimension dictated by your own mind." Hap studied his instruments, then turned back to me. "I do a little backyard astronomy. Mars has always interested me, but as an astronomer. You said you were a writer. Where does your interest in Mars come in? What kind of writer?"

I shrugged. "I write a little science fic—"

"Science fiction? Popeyed monsters and that sort of stuff?" Hap

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shook his head. "Damn." He pressed a button on his hand consol. "Skip, do you read science fiction?"

Long silence. "Yeah." Another long silence. "What about you two?"

Hap closed his eyes and nodded at me. I pressed my button to open a channel to the command module. "Hap reads the stuff; I write it."

Another very long silence. "I'll take a chance." Skip seemed to weigh his words. "Are you two . . . talking about traveling between dimensions?"

"Yes. There's some common desire that put all three of us into this dimension. That's what Hap thinks. That we all wanted the same dimension. What do we know about Mars?"

Hap shook his head, then broke in. "It's not what we know; it's what we want—what we want Mars to be." Hap looked at me. "What about you? What do you . . . wish Mars to be?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. I told the director, 'I want to go to Mars.' That's all." I bit my lower lip and looked at Hap. "But deep down, what was the Mars I asked for?"

Hap pressed his button. "Skip, is there any way to abort this mission?"

I began unbuckling while Hap waited for Skip's response. When I was loose, I pushed off for the hatch and tried to open it. "Nothing. It's jammed tight!"

I heard Skip's voice through the *Eagle*'s system. "No good! It's under computer control and I can't stop it! Separation in twenty seconds!"

I pushed back to my couch and buckled up. Hap was shaking his head. "My God. My God, what are we getting into?"

I reached out and punched him in the arm. "Look! We're in control just as long as we don't panic."

"God, when I think about some of the monsters I've read about . . ."

"Knock it—" I was cut short as the *Eagle* lurched, then began its entry burn. I switched on the radio. "Skip? Are you reading me? Skip?" I looked through my view port but couldn't get a look. By the time I'd adjusted the *Eagle*'s attitude, we were a long way from the command module. "Skip, do you read?" Three white streaks came from the direction of the planet, passed by the command module, then the sky filled with a bright flash. "Skip!"

Hap was blubbering. "Skip's dead. Poor Skip. Dear Jesus. What's happening?"

I craned my neck to peer after the streaks, sweat dribbling into my eyes. "If I were you, Hap, I'd start thinking about those streaks


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

coming after us."

If my comment was meant to calm my companion down a bit, it had a slightly opposite effect. Hap began flailing his arms and screaming as we approached the Martian atmosphere. Then he grabbed onto his half of the dual landing controls and froze. Through the view port I could see Syrtis Major rushing up at us. I reached out a hand and shook Hap's arm. If I didn't get him loose of the controls before the computer program expired and turned the flight over to us, it would be splat time. "Hap? Hap, you want to let go? Hap?" He kept staring straight ahead, arms frozen. I leaned over and punched him in the side of his head.

"Ow!" He released the controls and held his hand to his head. "What'd you do that for?"

"You were frozen on the controls, idiot. We're landing."

The readout on the computer indicated thirty seconds to landing, but the transponder showed us to be two and a half minutes from the surface at the rate we were going. I grabbed the controls and the computer let go. So do I believe my eyeballs or the transponder? I went with the instrument and plunged toward Syrtis Major.

"We're going to crash! Decrease the rate of descent!"

"Look at the transponder. We're still twenty kilometers up."

"You never heard of an instrument going haywire? Slow this thing down!"

"If I use up our fuel to land us ten kilometers short of the surface, we get to fall the rest of the way. A ten kilometer drop, even at this gravity, won't be pretty."

"But . . . what if the transponder is wrong? You'll smear us all over the place!"

"Why would I wish a bad transponder on us? Hell, I didn't even know what a transponder was until this dimension. You have a secret thing against transponders?"

Hap began blubbering again. "What has this got to do with anything?"

"This is a dream, Hap. Ride with it and see what happens."

"Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus . . ."

I turned back to the job and held my breath as the surface rushed up to meet us. We passed through it and Hap passed out.

The ground below was green, the waters blue. We were descending through a blue sky with chubby tufts of white clouds sprinkled about. The distance to ground peeled away and I headed for a plowed field to keep out of the trees. *Trees?* I threw the coal to the *Eagle VII* as we approached the surface, slowed to a hover about five



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meters above the ground, then the fuel ran out. We dropped like a stone and slammed into the field.

I cleared my head, looked out of my view port, and could swear that I was in a Virginia rural scene. I reached over and shook Hap's shoulder. "Hap. Hap! Wake up!"

"Waaa—?" He looked out of his view port, then back at me. "I don't get it."

I thought a moment. "Hap, you were right—about those secret wishes. I remember when the Viking lander reports came in—how disappointed I was about the lack of life upon Mars. This dimension is Mars with life!" I began unbuckling. "Come on, let's go outside."

Hap undid his buckles. "What about our pressure suits?"

"Trees, grass, plowed fields . . . oh, go ahead and take readings of the atmosphere, if it'll make you feel better."

"It would." Hap performed the checks, then nodded. "We have air; enough and the right kind." Hap frowned. "Why haven't we been in touch with mission control?"

I shrugged. "The orbiter had the rig, maybe? Anyway, no mission control is necessary for this dimension. It's you and me on a Mars with life." I reached to the hatch and opened it. The smell of freshly turned earth—uh, Mars—filled the *Eagle*. I climbed out, went down the access ladder, then stood on the field as Hap's head poked through the hatch. I waved him on. "Get down from there and let's look around."

Hap climbed down, then stood beside me. "When we were landing, did you see any structures? Habitations?"

"I didn't notice." I pointed toward a gap in the trees at the edge of the field. "I think there's a road over there. Let's head for it."

We made our way over the furrows, and as we reached the trees at the edge of the field, something roared overhead and both of us went into the underbrush. "Look!"

Hap was pointing his finger into the air. I glanced in the indicated direction to see three saucer-shaped crafts banking toward the *Eagle*. As they made a pass above the field, the *Eagle* disappeared in a bright flash. They roared overhead, then from behind, they banked around and came over the field again. Two of them continued on while the third settled to the ground. The side of the craft split and a long ramp extended from the opening. Then, ten metallic creatures emerged from the opening and clanked down the ramp. Hap looked at me, then went for my throat. "What kind of a sicko mind do you have? What are those?" I punched him in the head again. "Ow!"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now knock it off! Let's see what they want."

"After killing Skip and blasting the *Eagle*, I'd think it's pretty damned obvious what they want!"

"Shut up!"

The creatures fanned out to begin a search of the tree line. They were robots, no doubt, with almost a cartoon, Buck Rogers quality about them. I frowned and searched my mind for a clue. I don't know how many stories I'd written that I didn't know the ending myself until I had gotten it on the paper. If those walking garbage cans were creatures of my own mind, what ending had my sicko mind already thought up for hapless Hap and myself? I turned away from the field and looked through the windbreak to a field on the other side. Beyond it was a farmhouse. I tapped Hap on the shoulder. "Let's go."

Hap and I worked our way through the brush until we reached the field, then we ran toward the house. The thing had a gabled roof, clapboard siding and needed a fresh coat of paint. "What kind of . . . habitation is . . . that for a Martian?"

I puffed and shook my head. "Don't know." I looked over my shoulder to check on the walking junkyard. They were still poking around in the other field. I tripped on something and went sprawling into the dirt.

Hap grabbed my arm and pulled me to my feet. "Come on! Before they trace us!"

We began running again, and I winced every time my right foot hit the ground. I had twisted my ankle. We reached the house and went running around its corner to be out of view from the field. Hap leaned against the wall while I went to a screened-in back door. I knocked, and in moments a yellow, narrow-headed thing with suckers on the ends of its fingers came to the door. It wore denim coveralls and was sucking on a piece of straw. "Yep? What kin I do for you, young fella?"

I felt my upper lip curl as my eyebrows went down. "Knock off the Walter Brennan impression, will you? You've got to hide us. There's an army of robots after us!"

The creature put its thumbs under the straps of its coveralls and nodded. "Yep. I don't mind saying we pay a lot of good tax money for them robots, sonny."

Hap pushed himself away from the wall and stood beside me. He looked at the creature, then shook his head. "What are the robots for?"

It sucked on its straw a bit more, then rocked back and forth on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its toes. "Well, we seen whatcha done to your planet, sonny. We sort of like things the way they are. Them robots, along with the ships and projection system, make sure that you folks don't see nothin' but a dead planet. Too bad you fellas made it down here, 'cause now them robots'll have to kill ya."

Hap grabbed my arm. "Run! We've gotta run!"

I took a few steps after him, but I had a question that needed answering. I turned back. "What about the Viking probes? How come they sent back pictures of—"

It turned its back and walked from the door. "Don't know nothin' 'bout no Vikings, sonny."

I heard clanking, rushed to the corner of the house, and saw the squad of robots approaching the house. I turned and headed off into the woods after Hap. I couldn't find him or his trail. "Hap! Hap!"

I rushed through the trees, sharp branches swatting my face, I called and called again. Then I heard whirring and crashing behind me. A meter to my left, a swath of forest disappeared. I turned abruptly to my right and ran clang smack into one of those robots. I looked up from the ground, my head spinning, and saw two coal red eyes peering from under a helmet of silver. It raised a hand toward me as I blacked out.

"Which door?" It was Old Redeyes again.

"Did Hap come through here?"

"Which door?"

I sighed, then hung my head. "Home."

I opened my eyes in the dark room and could hear Helen snoring. I sat up and turned on the bedlamp. My hands were all scratched, and I could feel a lump on my head. The palms of my hands were crusted with still-wet dirt. The snoring stopped, Helen rolled over and opened her eyes. "My god, sicko, what have you been up to now?"

I looked at her. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you. But this time," I looked at the dirt on my palms, "this time I can prove it!"

The next afternoon I sat at my desk looking with disgust at my envelope of dirt scrapings. The stuff crawled with organics, said the soil chemist. About the one place he could guarantee that it didn't come from was Mars. I threw the envelope into my wastebasket, then leaned forward to finish the breakfast Helen had prepared for me. That was a new twist, since Helen never prepared breakfast.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I looked over my mail—bills, a fan letter, a fat envelope from a publisher. I opened the fat one and pulled out a set of galleys for a story of mine. Whatthehell, life must go on. Livings still must be made. I picked up my red pencil and began proofreading the sheets. Then I saw something that I *never* do: the word "said," as well as all of the other half-million inane alternatives, do not appear in my stories unless they cannot be avoided. If I find where I have to use something of the sort to clue the reader in who is speaking, I'll rewrite the story before I start with: he said, she replied, he suggested, she wailed, he murmured, she denied, he speculated, she confirmed—or anything like it.

I reached for my telephone, had the editor's number half-dialed, then I hung back the receiver. I stared at my filing cabinet for a solid minute, then got up, went over and pulled the manuscript for the galleys I had been checking. There it was in glowing black-and-white: he said, she promised . . . he pleaded, she coaxed . . . . The bloody thing crawled with them! I moved to my chair and sat down. All right. Perhaps there are no immutable laws—especially when we're talking about multi-dimension travel, dreaming, or whatever. But *that* is something I *never* do. *Never*. I don't care what kind or style of dimension anyone wants to cook up. I just don't do that!

The doorbell rang, and I jumped from my chair. After a few deep breaths, I went to the door and opened it. A man wearing an overcoat and a wild look pushed his way in. It was Hap! "Hap," I exclaimed.

"I thought I'd never find you," he replied.

"Then I'm not going crazy," I blurted.

"No," he confirmed. "Can we go somewhere and talk?" he suggested.

"My office," I nudged. "What happened to you?" I inquired.

We moved into my office, and Hap dropped into a chair. I walked around my desk and sat down. "I ran," he bemoaned. "I ran until I could no longer move. Then I fell down. I guess I fell asleep," he concluded.

"I was worried," I confessed. "But then you saw Redeyes," I stated.

"Yes," Hap agreed. "I was in such a state, I hated to think what dimension my mind would pick for 'home'. So, I told the director to send me where you went," he admitted.

"Hmmm," I muttered. "But what now?" I tempted.

"I'm going to kill the director," he ranted. "The very next time I get in that little round room, I'm going after that pile of eyeballs," he sputtered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why tell me?" I coaxed.

He looked at me. "I owe you that much. I wanted to give you a chance to get back to a dimension that you prefer before I put an end to this business once and for all," he declared.

I nodded. "Considering the way I write in this dimension, I think I'll try another," I explained. "But won't killing the director leave you suspended between dimensions?" I hinted.

"I don't care," he roared. "When I got home this time I found my wife in the arms of another man," he wailed.

"But that's this dimension; she'll be faithful in another," I offered.

"It doesn't matter," he babbled. "I could never bear to look at her after this," he cried. "Remember," he cautioned, "be certain you get into the dimension you want first thing tonight. I'll wait until eleven before I go to sleep."

I spent the rest of the day making up a shopping list of the things I wanted in my dimension. Then I spent the evening memorizing it. This time, when I said "home" I wanted to know what I meant. I felt almost sorry for Redeyes. After all, he was just doing his job. But that's how it goes. I'm here now. This Helen doesn't snore; and if I decide to stay up all night working, she stays up too and makes me coffee and brings me beer and great bowls of chili. I'm not very well known right now, but on my shopping list I ordained a happy future for my writing. Someday I shall be numbered among such present science fiction greats as Robert O. Heinlein, Frederik Pole, and the namesake of this inestimably superior publication, Isaac Karamazov.

**INSTANT PUBLISHING BUSINESS!**

You will receive 20 money-making reports. ($40 00 VALUE) sales circular, marketing program PLUS FULL REPRODUCTION RIGHTS! Print for pennies each at any quick printer. You are the publisher! You can even run this ad under your name! If we make money doing it, you should! COMPLETE SET-UP ONLY $6 95 FREE GIFT ($8 00 VALUE) if you send this ad and 4 stamps

EKENS PUBLISHING
Box 178284-IA-89, SAN DIEGO, CA 92117

**HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE. Treat it...and live.**

The National High Blood Pressure Education Program, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.



LICENSED TO NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE EXPLOSION OF BLABBAGE'S ORACLE

## by Martin Gardner

Professor Charles Blabbage, England's top expert on artificial intelligence, finally completed his construction of ORACLE, an acronym for Omniscient Rational Advance Calculator of Local Events. The computer was so powerful that it could (Blabbage maintained) predict with 100 percent accuracy any event in the laboratory within a period of one hour and inside a radius of ten meters from the computer's console.

This is how it operated. One could describe to ORACLE any event that would or would not occur during the next hour and within the specified radius. If the computer predicted that the event would take place it turned on a green light for "yes." If it predicted the event would not take place it turned on a red light for "no."

It was necessary, Professor Blabbage made clear, that the two lights be concealed until the hour was up. Otherwise anyone could easily render a prediction wrong by doing something to falsify it. For example, suppose the computer predicted "yes" to: "A cockroach will crawl across the west wall of the lab." If someone saw the green light he or she could stand guard by the wall to make sure the event did not occur.

Blabbage's assistant was Dr. Ada Loveface, an attractive young redhead with a doctorate in modern logic and set theory. On the day before Blabbage was to demonstrate ORACLE's powers for a group of distinguished visiting computer scientists, military moguls and government officials, Dr. Loveface approached him and said:

"I regret having to tell you this, Professor, but I've just proved that ORACLE can't possibly succeed in all cases. I can describe an event that will or will not take place in the lab, within the hour and inside the ten-meter radius, of such a nature that the computer will find it logically impossible to predict whether it will or won't happen."

Blabbage refused to believe Ada until she told him what the event was. Her remarks were so shattering that he collapsed in a faint and had to be taken to a hospital.

What event did Dr. Loveface think of? The solution is on page 48.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ALEX SCHOMBURG
## by Shawna McCarthy

Is Alex Schomburg really, as he somewhat facetiously claims, "the forgotten man of science fiction?" Or is he, as fans and collectors the world over seem to feel, the old master of science fiction art? In a field where it seems to be applied to anyone who's been around for over five years, the term "old master" can provoke a shudder. But there are some to whom the title deservedly belongs, and Alex Schomburg would certainly seem to qualify for their ranks.

Born in May 1905 on the island of Puerto Rico, of a German father and a Spanish mother, Alex and his family arrived in the mainland United States in 1912. His father, a civil engineer, was himself a talented artist, and so Schomburg says, "Art has been a part of my life since early childhood. Some of my father's talents were carried on to some of his offspring, myself included. A private art education was provided for me and for my brother August, who also showed a marked interest in art. It was inevitable, I suppose, that at some point, we would exploit the possibility of making a living out of our artistic ability."

And so, in 1923, Alex and August and two other brothers, Frederick and Charles, opened a commercial art studio in New York City. They found "a fair amount of success, mainly in the field of window displays done for General Electric, Great Northern Railway, Sanka Coffee, and many others."

It was at about this time that radio came on the scene, and Alex developed a consuming interest in the fascinating new "toy." He pored over the contents of the magazines devoted to radio, one of which, *The Electrical Experimenter*, was published by Hugo Gernsback.

"Following a circuit diagram in *The Electrical Experimenter*," Schomburg remembers, "I soon had assembled a small radio set. But try as I would, I could not make it work. In desperation, I decided to go to the publishers. As fate would have it, I met Gernsback himself, who kindly discussed the problem with me. Upon learning that I did art work, he suggested that I do a small pen-and-ink drawing for his magazine. He was pleased with my work, and other small assignments followed."

In 1925 and 1926, Schomburg got his first chance to do color covers for Gernsback. Not, however, in science fiction; Frank R. Paul was handling that; but for *Electrical Experimenter*. These,


ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Schomburg's first-ever published color covers, were, he says, "indeed horrible." Luckily, Gernsback did not agree, and Schomburg's relationship with him continued until Gernsback's death in 1967. By that time, Schomburg had done all of the color covers for Gernsback's later magazine *Radio Craft*.

In the '30s, the brothers gave up the art studio, and Alex took a job with a film company in New York City. He remained there for 11 years, moonlighting as a science fiction illustrator and a comic-book cover artist. His first SF cover appeared on *Startling Stories*, September 1939. "It depicted," Schomburg says, "some weird creatures stealing bodies from a cemetery. The signature was cut off in trimming, and there was no credit line in the magazine. Up to now, I think I was the only person who knew that it was done by me."

Other SF covers followed, for *Thrilling Wonder, Fantastic Stories*, and many more. Throughout the '40s, '50s, and '60s, Schomburg did covers for practically every magazine in the field: *Amazing, Fantastic, Startling, Wonder, Galaxy, Future, Fantasy & Science Fiction, Satellite*, and more. If you can remember another science fiction

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magazine of the time, chances are good Schomburg did at least one cover for them.

Throughout this period, Schomburg also did illustrations for just about every sort of pulp magazine the publishers had to offer. Detectives, westerns, mysteries, adventure, sports, and, of course, romance. His comic book work of that time was also prolific and professional. Some of his World War II-era "Captain America" covers are now collector's items. He still does an occasional assignment for Stan Lee of Marvel comics.

His artistic influences were varied: "Norman Rockwell's attention to detail fascinated me," he says, "and I also admired the airbrush technique of Maxfield Parrish, a craft with which I was familiar from my commercial art days, and one which would later come in handy in SF illustration. Today, my favorite artists are Chesley Bonestell and Robert T. McCall. They are masters of detail, a must in SF art."

Even a cursory examination of Schomburg's art will show that he is true to his own word. Even spot illustrations are painstakingly detailed, and many feature his favorite backdrop, the Universe.

"I consider the vast regions of the Universe—the galaxies and the planets (both known and unknown)—as the real background for all SF art. It is the real source of inspiration; an area that readily accepts all of the components of SF illustration, whether it be gadgetry, human figures, or surrealism. Even the monsters, the BEMs of old, fit quite comfortably into the background of the Universe. Virgil Finlay, Bergey, Bok, and many others were aware of the magnetism of the starry Universe in SF illustration," Schomburg explains.

How important is art education to a prospective illustrator? "Certainly," Schomburg says, "if one hopes to become a professional artist, one must have art education to some degree, especially in figure work. When one narrows the field down to SF art, the requirements increase proportionally. Not only must an SF artist be proficient in figure work, he or she must have a good knowledge of mechanics, and a good sense of 'that which looks feasible', especially in the area of gadgetry. In the early days of SF illustration, the artist could feel free to depict any sort of spacecraft his imagination could conjure up, regardless of physical dimensions or form. That was the real *fun* in early SF art. Not so today. Now that we have set foot on the moon, our spaceships must have the look of power."

When working, Schomburg says, "I never rush a job. I do my very best, regardless of the price. When working in color, I prefer to work


LICENSED TO MIT.EDU
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Tempera on heavy-weight illustration board, staying away from acrylics. These colors, in my opinion, are too fast; I like to build up detail slowly. When starting work on a cover assignment, I prefer to make a highly detailed color rough, and submit this for an okay or change. Thus, when the final sketch is approved, I can devote all my effort to the art. I do not have to think about color, and my only goal is quality. For black and white story illustrations, I generally submit one or two rough pencil sketches for editorial comment, after reading the manuscript. The okayed sketches are then redrawn on suitable board, and here again, the mind is free to work, minus the worry and uneasiness of perhaps creating a piece of art that might not please."

Schomburg enjoys reading all sorts of SF, but he says, "My tastes lean more toward time-travel stories. I like to illustrate these as they give me more opportunity for gadgets.

"I can't claim to have any favorite writers. Having illustrated stories for writers from Heinlein to Clarke and from Del Rey to Anderson, and many others, it would not be fair to cite a few. I like them all, and in a sense, they are responsible for keeping me working all of these past fifty years."

After "retiring" at age 65 in 1970, Schomburg found himself "reactivated" several years ago. Some of his recent covers for *Analog, Fantasy & Science Fiction, Baronet*, and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* are, he feels, among his best-ever work. His particular favorite these days is the cover of the January 1978 issue of *Analog* depicting a huge space station and shuttle.

Optimistic about the future of SF, Schomburg says, "Science fiction courses are now being taught in many universities. The writings of past and present authors have finally been recognized as important contributions to the art, and the great enthusiasm being shown by so many young writers today can only foretell good things for the future of SF. In fact, I think we may right now be in the midst of a second Golden Age of SF."

One of the most encouraging aspects of the present-day SF illustration field is, Schomburg feels, "the fact that it is now the rule, rather than the exception, for SF publishers to return all original art to the artists, since they buy only the right to reproduce. This was not so in the early days. Indeed, the artist seldom saw his original again after it was delivered to the publisher. Most were donated to fan clubs. Of the more than 200 covers done by me during the '50s, I now have on hand about 15, some of which I had to buy back from dealers." This can be a rather expensive undertaking, as


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an original Schomburg can go for $1,000 these days.

Oddly enough, despite his prolific output and his enduring reputation, he has never been awarded any prizes or honors in the field. He wonders if people think he has passed on, as have the two other SF illustrators with whom he worked most closely in the early days, Earle Bergey and Paul Wenzel. He says he is "the forgotten man of science fiction . . : well, almost."

Schomburg's hobby is carpentry, and to date he has built three houses, the latest an as-yet-unfinished beach house. He lives in Newberg, Oregon, and has a son, Richard, an electronics engineer, and a daughter, Diana, a fine-arts teacher.

An amiable and apparently contented man, Schomburg's attitude towards his career is simple: "Be happy in what you do, and forget the money."

## ANSWER TO THE EXPLOSION OF BLABBAGE'S ORACLE (from page 43)

Dr. Loveface thought of the following event: "ORACLE will make its next prediction by turning on its red light."

This would force the computer into a logical contradiction. If it turned on the red light for "no," the prediction would be wrong because the red light did in fact go on. If it turned on the green light for "yes," this too would be wrong because the green light went on, not the red.

While Professor Blabbage was recuperating, Dr. Loveface actually gave the event to ORACLE and requested its prediction. The computer's circuits went into a yes-no loop, producing a humming sound that grew steadily louder until suddenly the entire computer exploded, completely destroying Blabbage's life work.

There are many variations of this basic paradox which show that under certain conditions predictions of the future are impossible in principle. There is now a large literature on such prediction paradoxes, including several papers by the famous British philosopher of science, Karl Popper.

Can you think of an equivalent version of the computer paradox so simple that you can inflict it on a friend by speaking less than 15 words? See page 55 for the answer.

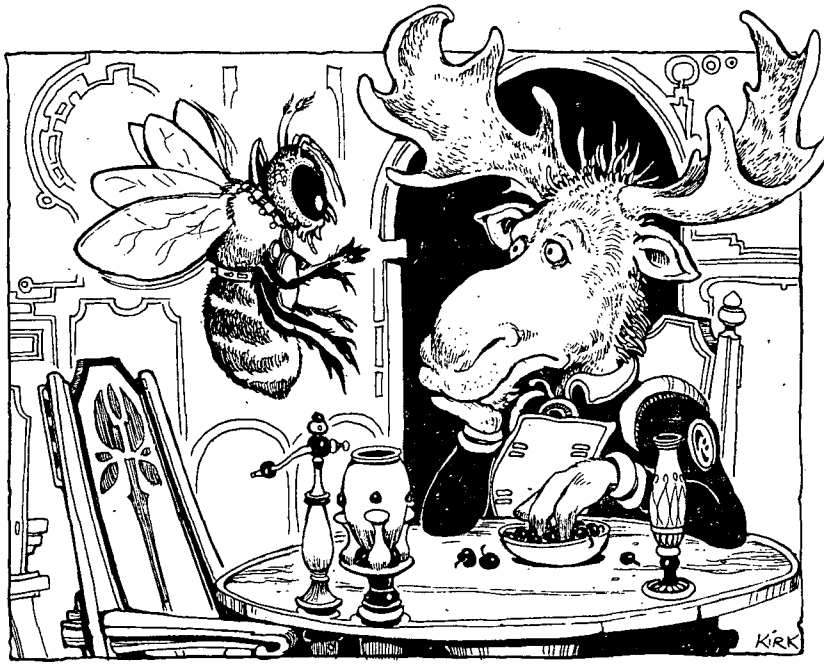


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# C.O.D.

## by Jonathan Milos

**art: Tim Kirk**




*A small tale on the perils of hasty assumptions, overlong access times, and* really *ancient ancestors.*



LICENSED TO LUNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Greetings, people of RC 7761, otherwise known as Earth.

No, that's silly. I didn't spend all that time and trade balance stuffing my monitor-brain with your idioms to address you like that. Not even the few of you I talk to directly.

You see—and you may never read this particular line, I don't know what kind of censorship goes on down there—you may have been told there was only the one contact with the Consortium of the Thousand Stars, but you weren't told the truth. We keep a line of communication open, which your people with access to it call the Spacevine. Interesting idiom. If you'd like to talk on it too, sorry, you don't qualify. We don't need talkers, we need listeners. Especially from Re—uh, Earth. You'll see why.

I was in a tavern on Ef'tle, chewing berries to forget; the silly things are toxic if you take too many, but then, so is *chil*, my favorite tipple. And if I didn't clean out my holding-brain every few turns I wouldn't have any place to put stories, and I make a pretty good living off those stories. MedServ gives me pills for berry hangover, but it's money that keeps me in *chil*.

So there I was, chewing berries and swallowing the seeds—thus cleaning out mind and body at once—when a Zhanzherezhin—oops, a Zhanzherezh*ine*—came up to see me and eyed my plate. "Honor," she said.

"Honor to you," I said. I noticed then she was wearing a RescueService plate and a Captain's pendant, and her claws were empty. "You must be fresh landed. Drink, your choosing?"

"I am *not* frezzh-fallen," she buzzed, "and I am *not* intoxicating."

Now that was news worth recording, right there. Zhanzherezhini pilots are common enough—they've got it all over us poor creatures without faceted eyes or gyroscopes built into our skulls—but a Zizzy Captain grounded and sober not only wasn't common, it to my knowledge just *wasn't*.

I shoved the bowl of berries away and fired up my recording-nerves. "Transact at your word," I said.

"How much for a tale of the world RC 7761?"

I bit down hard, hurting my mouth on a stray berry-pit. RC 7761 is an outThousand planet whose inhabitants, prespace sapients, call it Dirt, or Earth, or Soil. I know that a RescueService ship had made some kind of a deal there that had raised the twin spirits of Rumor and Secrecy; some facts, any facts, in the matter were worth my plate. So I just counted my trade balance, deducted an eighth for emergency, and offered the Zizzy the rest.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She *bzzzed* at me and said "It'll do." I should have thought it would; it was twice a deepspace Captain's Guaranteed Trade Wage for a full turn. But I just said, "I transfer," and pressed our plates together. Click, hum. It's so easy to spend balance these days. I ordered a mug of *chil* out of my remaining finances, switched brains and listened.

Some seven million turns ago (said the Captain) ScienceService detected a magnetic flare about to blow in the C Segment of R Galaxy; not much of a flash, but enough to raise the Great Beast with neurally advanced creatures. So RescServ was dispatched to scan and evacuate if necessary.

RescueService was overloaded then as now, and nobody expected to have to evacuate anything anyway, so all that actually got sent were a light scientific cruiser and an automated sublight mass-freezer of the *Obon* class—which haven't, incidentally, been made for five million turns. I know all this; I've looked it all up, with JustiServ at my wingtip—but that part comes later.

When that long-ago Rescue team got to RC 7761, they found intelligent life after all—not technociv, but tool use, limited control of fire, villages. A nice solid start down the road to the Thousand, about to get pinched off hard.

Beastslayer only knows how they communicated with the natives. Meta-Linking was still in the fry-your-brains stage. Maybe they had some natural telepaths. Anyway, somehow they convinced the locals, who called their planet Reeth, that the big bright yellow thing was going to get big and eat them all up, unless they got aboard the little silver brother-to-moon in parking orbit. I did say this place had a moon, didn't I? Big one, the size of an Outpost of the Thousand.

So the natives and some of their livestock got in and got cold. RescServ had to hustle to get them in before the magstorm, but they managed, just like we usually manage.

They had to find them a planet to resettle on. They couldn't just wait out the flash and take them home; the ecosystem would have been all broken-winged, they'd never had adjusted to it. So another place had to be found.

Every race is the same in one way: they're all impossible to please. This one likes it hot, this one cold, this one needs UV to keep its genetic tension down, this one needs hot sulfur pools—

And while they looked for an appropriate place to dump fifty thousand frozen Reethi, there was a, well, clerical error.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I maintain that makes it CompServ's liability—yes, I know what the InterService contract says down the side, but still—sorry. I'll go on.

(She shaded her eyes from the sight of a party of carousing Zhanzherezhini.) What happened was, they got misfiled. Lost. Forgotten. For seven million turns, that old *Obon*-class kept going nowhere, everyone on board it cold and happy. At that, they were lucky they were on an underlight ship; time dilation took over, and the machinery didn't wear out and nobody thawed too soon.

CompServ claims that they never really lose anything; they just build up long access times. Maybe they're right. They finally found that old massfreezer. And guess who got tagged to repatriate them? Me and my ship, of course. A hundred thousand crews on the board, and—

Well, it *was* our idea to take the Reethi back to 7761. The planet-finding situation hasn't gotten any better in seven megaturns, and things back home should certainly have stabilized in that amount of time. Evolution? Of course there'd have been evolution, but the Thousand's lasted, what, a hundred million turns? We know how evolution operates. Sure as the Queen's drones love her, we do.

What we found was a whole planet radiating noise into the middle ranges, pumping combustion products into the atmosphere at an incredible rate—we couldn't have breathed it for a nanoturn without passing out—and what looked like starship maintenance stations, all over the surface. *Looked* like. We tried to lock and land at one—and the Beast-netted thing was a habitat complex. Imagine: a city spread out to the size of a medium cruiser! And that wasn't even the biggest. They directed us to that one, which didn't have any facilities either, except a big paved area named for a tribal deity.

This place, Advancedyork, had an intertribal negotiations center, apparently the only one operating. Tribalism and fusion demolitions, they turned out to have, but no fusion generators. Yet. May the Net ensnare them.

We shuttled down, making sure to take plenty of portable environment with us. We told them what we were there for; that we had a shipload of their ancestors, coming out of freeze, and that they were being returned pending the usual fee.

(The Captain paused to smooth her fur. For the benefit of my listeners, the fee she refers to is negotiated by RescServ with the group they service. They can ask for whatever they can get, and it goes on the indestructible receipt. If—and only if—the receipt for



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

services is blank, EconoServ will pay the team back their expenses, and no more. RescueService has gotten very good at negotiating fees. And after all, how much is not burning up worth to you?)

At least (the Zizzy continued) our Linker tried to send that. When I said earlier that I didn't know how they communicated with natives before the Meta-Link—I certainly don't understand it now. Our Linker's in MaintServ now. If she so much as sees a mindset she bounces off the ceiling.

For that reason, I can't tell you much of what happened among the inhabitants. Apparently one tribe said they didn't have room for the Reethi because their economy was planned in advance. Then another tribe said they'd take the whole group because they were the land with streets of soft metal, and the first tribe accused them of an untranslatable expression and offered to pay the whole fee plus a tenth extra in lightly armored ground combat vehicles. And then some little tribes said they'd take the Reethi if it would start a fight between the first two tribes—this is just what a hysterical Linker told me, you understand. There even seemed to be some kind of relevant local legend, but it involved a deluge of neutron-moderating fluid rather than electromagnetic radiation.

We brought up the fee again, and everybody got quiet. It seems the tribes never discuss trade in council; only the restraint of other tribes' trade. And then it turned out that they knew just about nothing about deuterium and didn't have enough of it collected in one place to be worth the loading aboard. And they'd never even *heard* of *wykoras skansi*. We asked what was locally valuable, and they named some easily-synthesized metals.

I had the Linker, who was jittery but not quite gone, scan some of them for what they actually thought was worth something. The first answer was universal, but I doubt that the novelty would last. The second is hard to export, there being only one Universe to be the absolute master of. We went past some things you wouldn't *believe*—and finally got to something called "oil." Stuff was Beastly near magical, to read the Linker—and it wasn't her fault, I suppose, poor worker.

Now, the thing about this "oil" was, no two tribal spokesmen visualized it the same way. With the valuable soft metal, they all had the same picture—shiny yellow ingots of it piled up—but "oil" was different. Some of them saw towers of some kind, some saw metal cylinders, some saw a sand field, some huge metal surface vessels—*now* do you perceive why the image didn't get across to us? Queen's curse on CommServ! —Apologies.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So we said we'd take a shipload of "oil." And they started protesting at once. There was one little cluster of tribes who seemed absolutely insane over the stuff. Finally we caught something about energy sources, and shortages—that was when we found out they had uncontrolled fusion but not generators.

So I said, may my mouth chew the Net forever, "Will you sign the receipt if we add a d-pack to the exchange?" After all, the ship only needed two of its three; and I can't tell you how much I wanted to get off that place.

They called us "Bs," did I mention—it's the second symbol in their script system. Beeez—like the noise an airlock alarm makes. Maybe they called us after our speech pattern. Beeeeez—do I talk like that?

(Sobriety seemed to be taking a dreadful toll on the Captain. I told her that her voice was beautiful, nothing at all like an airlock alarm.) Well. There was a creature we observed during descent that resembled you, Informator, but it was called "moose."

Finally, with a hold full of "oil" —which seemed to be metal cylinders after all—off we went, hoping never to return.

And then . . . and then . . . sometimes, Informator, I think that we are all in the Great Beast's Net already, and we merely have not reached the cords. About a thousand light-turns out, we had a failure—and was it maneuver thrust? Was it waste recirculation? No. It was a d-pack, of course, putting us on half power. Which dropped us a full overlight quantum, so that a tenth-turn trip would now require a whole one.

As we crept along, our wings clipped, one of the Scientors aboard suggested we run tests on the priceless alien "oil," to discover its characteristics.

We found out. We had gotten a paid-in-full slip—given up our EconoServ expense subsidy—for a holdful of completely unrefined liquid hydrocarbons. A shipload of raw booze!

"So what did you do then?" I asked—the first time I'd had to prompt the Captain.

"What do you think we did? I apologize—your cognitive brain is off, of course." She looked bitterly at my *chil* mug. "We distilled it and drank it, of course. And drank it and drank it—I must admit it was not bad stuff; but can you imagine a full turn in space, drunk, with a crew in the same condition? I Queen's-life wonder about those Earthi, living with a solar period of only a tenth-turn, breathing an atmosphere that'd sozzle any thinking creature.

"Now you know why I am not intoxicated, and may never be



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again; at least, not until JustiServ finds a loophole in that payment slip."

I switched my nerves back and inclined my horns. I had trade's worth, all right.

Well, now you know why so few of you on RC 7761, known to many as Earth, get to hear things through the Spacevine. Do you think the Captain would have told that story to an, ah, Earthi? *I've* given you the story straight, remember, just as it appears in release to All the Thousand. Any omissions are the fault of your own people, just as it wasn't our fault you chose to translate our turns into your "years," misjudged the age of your returning ancestors, and assumed that you were getting a shipload of early cavemen or whatever. The RescueService Captain didn't say a *word* about the Reethi being human, or primate, or even mammal.

But be of good cheer, Earthi. (Damn idiom pill again.) Tonight, walk out on a street lit by the clean fusion power we gave you as part of the deal, and then say something nice to a Reethi—a name they prefer to what you called them when you thought them extinct so many millions of turns, or tens of millions of years ago—and of course they are a lot smarter than the dinosaurs that *did* get wiped out by that magnetic flare.

Remember, you *won* the horse trade.

## SECOND ANSWER TO THE EXPLOSION OF BLABBAGE'S ORACLE
## (from page 48)

Say to a friend: "Will the next word you speak be 'no'? Please answer 'yes' or 'no'."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# STONE CRUCIBLE

by John M. Ford

art: Vincent DiFate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Mr. Ford—of the blond moustache,*
*the midwestern accent, and a truly*
*remarkable reading speed—has*
*for us a . . . strange . . . war.*

The moment Damon heard the pickup signal, he knew he wasn't going to make it. Retrieval boats were built stupid for safety: once the registry point went into the walnut-sized brain in its decimeter of armor, nothing got it out again save pulling the whole core. In general practice, the security was worth the price. But woe to him who paid the price: called drop too early, and found the boats waiting on the wrong side of the Styx.

As Damon's company had done. They were supposed to be here to hold the ground, not fight the natives, but the Dunlucers were all over this coldest, barrenest plateau of their cold, hard planet, and the very devil to sense until it was too, too late. Someone in the future would write a book calling this one of the great tactical moves of the Dunluce Action. If, of course, anyone was permitted to write about the Dunluce Action.

Damon fired a pulse from his starcaster; a pile of rocks went up in gravel and more plasma and broken, burning men, and one of the red clusters on Damon's scanner blinked and disappeared.

It was a nice shot, but not good enough for today. The linked lightning of chainguns began seeking on the 'caster flash, harrowing the soil nearby. Damon could hear the ratchet and ping of automatic mortars from all directions at once, and knew it wasn't a trick echo.

Snow blew in front of him then, a flying swirl, and he saw the flat shape of a retrieval boat settle up ahead, its grab-bar beckoning across the red waves of interdicting fire.

—Go and maybe die, or stay and die for certain.

Damon plotted out a path, tensed and moved, running and dodging his damnedest across the uncertain ground and scattershot snow. He could see the boats clearly now, close enough to touch through the mess, no more then a hundred meters, when the shells showed up on his scanner.

—Shells, hell.

Then one came down, ahead and to the left, an orange splash and a windy cracking sound.

—Splayfire!

And he was in the thick of them, long thin splayshells dropping and exploding in spheres of molten metal. Close, they seared.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Father away the splay condensed into ugly fragments.

WHAMCRACK, WHAMCRACK, he heard, and Mackey's pattern on the commx signaling Hit and Crippled. Schole, the company leader, announced his assist, and then a WHAMCRACK and the squeal of a melting combox cut him off.

Damon checked his scanner, found lots of red blips, just a precious few green ones, and those flashing, vanishing. And the big green crosses of the boats, just ahead a few meters full of death.

The loudest crack in the world went off behind him, picked him up bodily and thrust him forward and over, so so slowly—

—Not dead?

He opened an eye. The fouled snow of the Dunluce plateau lay about him, scattered with shattered rocks and bodies, too many friendly.

And one man, alive. Wearing the wrong uniform.

—Go away. Let me lie. Think I'm dead.

Damon saw the soldier clearly enough, though at an off angle. He didn't dare turn to follow.

The man wore a torn, muddy, leather greatcoat, which hung open revealing a plain gray tunic and trousers; a Dunlucer trooper's uniform. He had a couple of medals, but the Dunlucers liked medals. Damon doubted he was more than a two-slasher. He'd probably gotten the coat from a dead officer.

He held a shoulder starcaster in one hand like a big pistol; either he was innocent of uncollimated beam weapons or he knew something special about them. The greatcoat's pockets bulged with what looked like tossbombs and hand guns. Score a point for the scavenger theory.

He turned, and Damon looked up, just slightly. He scoped in and saw blue eyes, wet and bright in a dirty square face. Wild beard grew on a lantern jaw. There was snow in his sandy hair, more snow atop the goggles on his forehead.

—He's not wearing his goggles!

Damon felt for his chainguns. He couldn't hope for a first-fire kill, but if the Dunlucer snapshot back he'd blind himself—

—Better not hope for that. Never assume the enemy's stupid. But if he grabs for his eyes, or goes for cover, he'll just be a moving target.

—A win all ways. I'll have to rapid-traverse the rear gun, open the rear eye all at once. No sweat. Just like the parade ground at Chryse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Dunlucer stepped to Damon's right, out of view, and Damon tensed to go.

Red indiks lit. Cursing himself for a corewipe, he somaswept, sensor by sensor fore to aft. The splayshell must have gotten him but good: his starboard and aft eyes were blind, the aft chaingun didn't respond, there was damage to the starboard rollrocket launcher, though the Viper rockets all seemed intact.

And the soldier was *behind* him. Back to playing holed-hulk. He gently shuttered his eyes and lay absolutely still, disengaging everything that would uncouple, letting the snow around him cool the power core.

—I'm dead. I'm a battle score, slogger. Don't fool with the rear panel, there's nothing inside.

The only man-sized opening in Damon's hull was flush door on the portside rear, bolted tight and without a handle, obviously not for casual opening and closing. The small, clear NO ENTRY marking was in SignAl; it didn't matter whether the man was literate or not.

He scanned the panel. The holding bolts read as coldspots, broken in the explosion, but continuity was present. The panel was closed.

—Maybe there's mud on it. Or ice, or a scar. Maybe the splay welded it shut. Or he's just scared to poke around inside a track hulk.

Damon felt the panel kicked in.

With some effort, he opened the internal eye. It was a backup system, low-resolution, set for vis-range. He couldn't see much besides a trapezoid of gray light. He left the internal lighting off, naturally. He strained the eye as far down into IR as it would go, picking up odd patterns, some normal, some not, none human. Then a shape cut into the opening. He recognized it at once: the muzzle of a 3x5 starcaster.

"Anybody in there?"

Damon nearly answered, then realized the Dunlucer was looking for crewmen inside him. He somascanned again on the rear chaingun; still out, probably for good. And the turret weapons couldn't hit a man that close to the rear plate, even if he could bring them around in time.

—Keep up the game, then.

"I should tell ye, sirs, your vehicle's nary use to me without a driver. If ye don't answer me in ten seconds, I'll assume ye're all dead and light ye a nice fun'ral pyre."


LIBRARY.ELFWOOD.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Damon picked up the tickling whine of a charging 'caster.

"Five seconds."

The 'caster plipped with a full cell.

"Four. Three. Two."

Damon powered up, as many systems as he could handle at once. He lit the interior, swung the turrent for show, lined into the voder. "Wait," he said. He hadn't used words for some weeks, and hoped he didn't sound too inhuman. In the new illumination he could see the Dunlucer clearly, leaning over his weapon. The man's goggles were in place, and the IR overlay traced out the rapidly pulsing veins in his forehead and hands.

"I'm waiting," he said. "If it'll move ye any, the battle's been done for half a day. It's darkening now."

Damon opened all his good eyes in a patchy sphere-view. He saw the same battlefield scene as before, multiplied, and the sun low and red above black mountains to the west.

"Hold your fire," Damon said. "Be warned, I can blow this track to filings if I want." Which was true enough. Destruct was ready to hand—but not yet, not just yet. No obligations weighed just yet.

"Well, that makes us just even, doesn't it? Look here, sir or sirs, I don't want ye dead, nor e'en prisoner, that'd be silly, wouldn't it . . . all I need is a ride off this mountain, which I think you'll find to be a mutual benefit. There's nary pickup for us here, sir, save by the razorbirds."

The Dunlucer was right, of course. Damon would have been written off by now as dead or destructed.

—Damn the stupid boats!

He had to find another battle, get a pickup. He reached into memory for the attack map. The next and nearest assault drop was at a place called Cullen Stones, at the base of the ridge to the west. The terrain was poor; the ridgeline was marked with the symbol for No Advance Possible.

—But hell, that's for companies and army groups. It's only a few days. The drop's not for fifty hours Standard. And I can shake this slogger. I've got to shake him, dammit; can't lead the enemy smack into a dropzone.

Damon felt suddenly bold. He had a way out, now. There was still the matter of the Dunlucer, but—what had the Damon-Programmer been so fond of saying? *When wartracks meet men, the men lose.*

Damon riffled through storage, cycled the Human Intermode

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Package from cold-storage to hot. "There's a gun on you right now," he told the soldier firmly. "That makes it a standoff—and I can wait."

The man nodded, with a look of resignation—but not, Damon noticed, of defeat. "Oh yes," he said. "No fighting for some days yet. Ye won't attack *here* again, oh no, not ye; and look at those clouds to the west: weather's too heavy for a good clean death fra' above.

"So off we go, then; I'll leave ye, ye'll leave me, before any man's army or any stinking officer ever sees."

*"Why don't I blow you away where you sit?"*

"Officer candidate, are ye? Well, nary matter, I'll tell ye why ye won't. Ye canna shoot me with an ion-gun, for that'd be the same as if I fired maself. And ye know my finger's tight on the trigger, and there's nothing else ye can have in this little cabin can kill me dead enough quick enough to keep me from squeezing it."

"Do you think," Damon said, hoping his voice hit the proper steely register, "that I'd betray my—people—just to keep myself alive?"

The Dunlucer looked thoughtful, then pulled a cloth from his pocket with his left hand and blew his nose. "No. That I don't think. No more than I can see how ye think it's a betrayal to take me with ye to Cullen Stones, when a blind man can see that's where ye're going."

Damon reached out for the Destruct interlock. Red light flickered in the Dunlucer's face.

"Oh, look, man! Ye only want to hold this rock against your enemies; ye only have an army here 'cause we're not sure we share those enemies. This chunk o' ground was a little too exposed, so on ye go round th' orbit to the next one—and I daresay it's good armor ground. Ye'll likely do better there.

"Then, too, there's another reason."

"I'm listening."

"Ye'll never get down Cullen Ridge without me. Look to your maps."

Damon did so. He saw the line of symbols, all across the ridge: No Advance Possible. Meaningless to a single element—unless—he read off the contours. They squeezed together, one after another, like magnetic films around a fusion core; delineating a drop of a thousand meters.

"You know of a pass down that?"

"Ye might say."


LICENSED TO MIT.EDU
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Damon clutched in the tracks. He lurched forward, bumping up and over rocks and broken metal; the Dunlucer grabbed his 'caster's foregrip and tensed, looking wild. Then he levered himself fully inside the hull, sat back against a housing and nodded. "Head for the three stones like fingers," he said, "the center one raised up. There's a pass there, of sorts."

"Why are you telling me now?"

"I feel friendly. No, telling ye where the track starts isn'a one with guiding you down. And ye won't dare go down at night."

"I can see in the dark . . . I've got vision gear."

"And what good is that against double-moon tricks, and sudden ice, and snow-under-crust? Ye're in the country of the enemy, now. Look, man, will you call me partner, if not friend, for two nights? I'm Shan Kienast, of the Sixth Mobile Militia, Iongunner First. Now on—ah—detached service."

"Damon. Fourth Armored, Company E."

"Just Damon? Are ye alone in there?"

"Just Damon. And yes . . . I'm alone."

—And if I should die, eight other Damons in eight other companies will go on. In us is the Programmer immortal—

The sun was bisected on the ridge line. Damon adjusted the Big Eye to a comfortable setting, blanking out most of the useless data the Eye tried to superimpose on his vision. He didn't care, just now, where he might profitably target his starcaster or roll-rockets; right now they were just pieces of pipe.

He kept watching the soldier, Kienast, all through the drive; watched him produce and fill a pipe without releasing his grip on his gun. He tamped the tobacco with his left thumb, held the pipe close to the check port of the 'caster.

Damon barely managed to twist down his internal eye in time to keep the actinic blue spark from scarring its matrix.

"Kienast!" He groped for modulation. "Are you blind?"

"In one eye," he replied cheerfully. "Tossbomb splinter, the first time you fellows ever landed. Oh, ye mean the flare. When you're Gunner First, ye learn to blink quick."

"You can't just close your eyes against a 'caster pulse."

"Caster—oh, y'mean ion-gun. Well, ye can if they mend your eyelids with plastic."

—And I would have lost the gamble, outside.

When they reached the vertical stones, one moon was up and the other rising, and jagged double shadows fell across the silvered snow. Damon picked up wind noises, and a crack that might


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been distant thunder, and sounds that were probably wind again but sounded animal.

"Stop, Damon, and let's have a look around." And, slinging his gun, Kienast vaulted out the open hatch and up on the hulltop, and as Damon swung the turret round to meet him Kienast tossed his greatcoat over it and sat on the crossbeam.

"There is where your antipersonnel stuff is, isn't it?"

"There's a . . ."

**(GRID: HOTGRID ANNOT 2274)** said the harder, deeper wiring that did not think, but neither forgot.

**(ANNOT:::warning this data is coded /sensitive/ and not to be released without appropriate authorization)**

—Oh, authorization be damned. If there was ever a nonstandard situation, this was it.

". . . yes."

"Why are ye whispering? It's just ye and me and the cats-a-mountain."

"There's ice on the speaker."

"Oh." Kienast chipped it clear. "That better?"

Damon caught himself answering "Much," and made it "Maybe."

Kienast knocked his pipe on one of Damon's rollrocket launchers. "Magna Mater, will ye bend a little? Come closer to the edge, a meter or five."

"Uncover the scanner."

"Ye've scanners all over," but he pulled the coat away, swept it with a flourish and danced about behind the turret. Damon fired one shockdart, which Kienast dodged easily.

"Stop it, y'fool, and look!"

Damon didn't trigger the screambeam, though he had the rods humming. He clutched in hard, and couldn't see but felt the slogger hit the plates, on his belly, an arm wrapped around the turret bearing.

Damon braked sharply, looked past the standing stones, down the cliff. Kienast banged elbows on the hull top, crawling forward.

"Look," he rasped, "damn ye."

Damon spun up the image-amp on the turret eye. He saw half-lit, complex, uncertain shapes of black and white; some rock, some doubtless shadow. There were strips of coarse, sparkling light—gravel, maybe a path.

He switched the Big Eye to terrain analysis. A sketch map of glowing lines appeared before him—or wherever it appeared; solip-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sism was not encouraged in the Armored units. The planes of the cliff were revealed annotated with estimated tractive values, angles of approach and repose. He slid the map into hot storage, changed points of view and began searching for the trail down.

He ran calculations for a quarter of an hour, watching ice glaze and moonshadows shift; he polarized out the moonlight and found his input crapped out. There were a hundred possible paths. And there was certainly no more than one real one.

A strain cell told him of a slow, rhythmic tapping on his upper glacis; then something fluttered in front of the Big Eye. A human hand.

"And will ye go down there tonight, Damon?"

"No. You were right, Kienast. Come back inside."

The soldier stood—slowly—and walked back to the cabin.

"I really didn't believe you, Kienast."

"How the hell could ye? There's a war on." He spoke with a curious inflection, one Damon almost remembered from other human voices; but the thought was too deep in cold storage. He couldn't translate it.

—There's one thing, though.

"Something, Kienast . . ."

"Eh?"

"I'm not h— I . . . this isn't a manned track."

"I know."

"You do?"

Kienast shifted comfortably against the front wall. "Ye're mounting a twenty-by-ninety ion-cannon forward. The plumbing and shielding for one of those would fill up the front end of this vehicle just nicely, thank ye. No, Damon, if there was a man up forward, he'd be all twisty tight from the magnets and glow like both moons from the rads.

"What's this room for, then? Access to your innards? I'll be cautious what I touch, then."

"Then why—"

"I've guessed wrong before. See these eyes? And . . . I wasn't sure what I could threaten a mech with.

"Good-night and all now, Damon. Do you sleep?"

"No," he lied.

"Well, that's fine. Wake me at first light, then, please."

Damon dimmed the internal lighting. He shifted the turret eye to move-watch, rotated the turret once slowly to burn the pattern in. Anything that changed in that pattern would trigger a reply.


LICENSED TO MIT.EDU
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then he set it to sweep, put the anti/p weapons on automatic, and wired the clock for seven hours of program-clearing routines . . . of sleep.

It was a luxury; he needed a tenth of that, could get by on a twentieth with some loss of clear core. And he tried suddenly to think why he wanted luxurious oblivion—

—The man has his hand on the Key.

Kienast's fingers lay curled on the popout panel that concealed the box and cable. The socket was outside, under a weatherhead but no trouble to find if you knew what you wanted.

The Key. And memories.

"And who are you?" asked the man who held the box, held his thumb on the buttons.

"Combat Vehicle *Forrest*-class, serial 1443029, assembled and activated at the Chryse Works, Mars, Hawkwood Arma—"

"No," the man said. "Your name is Damon. My name is Damon, too. Say it, Damon."

"Combat Veh—"

Thumb down on the button, a spark in his mind, and suddenly his name *was* Damon; what else could it be?

More days would pass, more questions, more pushes of what the Programmers called among themselves the Goof Button. And with each press the mindspark cut deeper, never quite causing the sensation transliterated as "pain" but triggering more and more Avoidance Protocols.

"*Damon*," the machine asked the Programmer, "why does it feel so wrong when you do that?"

"Improper question," said Programmer-Damon automatically, but his thumb halted just above the Goof. His head turned, and his bloodflow changed (though it would be later that Machine-Damon would learn to interpret those subtle infrared shifts) and he said "Why do you ask that, Damon?"

*Why* **(TRIGGERED RESPONSE**
**(:EXERCISE:::GETFILE T4014**
**(THRUFILE: FLAG 9c**
**(FLAG: I asked you a question soldier /emph/)**

"Sir! I believed it might be of tactical use should the Key fall into enemy hands. I believed I should understand phenomena related to my somatic functions *sir*."

Programmer-Damon shook his head—unsatisfied? Displeased?

"Damon, this is what happens," and he


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**(POSTWIRED JUMP: AVPROC**
**(BYPASS: GATE 2 sec)**

Kienast's hand lay over the Key, a moment's insertion away—

—And I'm helpless now as if he had the damned thing inserted and connected.

There was one option open. One, now while his will was free. He could open the shunt in his power core, go up like a new star. Damon did have that option.

**(INTERLOCK:::CLOSED: CALL KEYWORD)** said the subconscious wiring, and the conscious metawiring remembered the words for suicide.

**(KEYWORD: it is a far far**
**(BREAK BREAK BYPASS: GOTO 7595**
**(RETURN)**

—But he hasn't found it yet. He hasn't even looked for it. Maybe they don't have any idea

**(LOOP: FLAG 81r**
**(FLAG: be always ready to make the supreme sacrifice)**

—how it works. I have a duty as a soldier to return to my unit no matter what the personal risk

**(UNJUMP: SUBROUTINE S**
**(SUBR:::SELFPRES)**

—but I am still a functioning combat unit facing enemy presence.

He had to sleep!

—I'll feel him take it. It'll wake me. The Destruct cycle takes forty-four seconds from go to blow. If he finds it, it'll be the last thing he ever sees.

—Revise. We ever see.

**(CONSCIOUS MODE:::SHIFT [DESCRAMBLE]: CALL KEYWORD**
**(KEYWORD: sleep the twin of death)**

—But not death.

He did not dream *per se*, but on awaking there was a consciousness of having *done* something, played a game or solved a puzzle, or . . . or something.

He somascanned, found the Key still in its storage pocket, untouched. Then the somasweep indicated only two shockdarts remaining in the magazine and an overheating indik lit for the screambeam rods. Damon seized direct control of the turret, turned down the image-amp and spun on the weapons perimeter:


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a round dozen big cats lay about, on an arc within sonic range. Scoped in he saw they had all been hit by a least one dart, some by more than one; but all had come on to be killed by the beam.

"Kienast. It's dawn, wake up."

"Eh? Oh, g'd morning, Damon."

"Kienast, look outside."

"Stick my head up your sonic? Or did ye fix that busted rapid-gun during the night?"

"Look . . . please."

"*Well*, now," the man said, and put his gun down before leaning out the panel. Dmaon watched the man on IR, saw blood drain from his face.

"Great moon fall down," Kienast said softly. "Cats-a-mountain, sure, but so many, so big . . ."

Then he snatched up his starcaster, moving with surprising speed in the confined space, and a bolt the color of summer lightning leapt out to one of the animal bodies.

Kienast watched it smoke and sizzle, in a puddle of refreezing water. Then he unslung the discharged 'caster and disarmed it with a few swift finger motions. Leaving the gun behind, he buckled his greatcoat tight and crawled outside. He walked around Damon, to the cliff, and looked down.

"Let's go."

Damon clutched in low and inched forward.

"No, not here. Over this way," and the soldier pointed out a spot ten meters from the one he had indicated the night before.

They began switchbacking down, one side hugging rock and the other exposed. There was not really a path down the mountain. There were only rocks secure enough to bear weight and dry enough to give traction, and those were scarce. Damon said as much.

"—think I *know*?" Kienast shot back, and a stone the size of his head shot out from beneath his left foot. He sucked in breath and spread out on the cliff face, as the stone fell for seconds, and seconds, and seconds . . . and cracked like distant artillery, with a small echo. A little snow dusted over Kienast's shoulders; Damon felt pebbles fall on one of his rocket housings.

"Rules of the mountains," the man said. "Watch your step, and make no noise you can't help making.

"Now come ahead, just to me and no farther, and let me aboard."

Kienast locked an arm round the turret crossbeam, hooked the


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toe of a boot into the bent exhaust of the starboard rollrocket launcher. From there he rode Damon's back, shouting bits of advice that went from irrelevant to crucial and back again.

—But he knows the mountain, damn it; he's leading and all I'm doing is ferrying. All I *can* do is . . .

"Hard left at the angle there!"

Damon eased off power on the port tracks. Stones slid from beneath them and were gone. His starboard side scratched at the rock face.

"*Hard* left! *Lock it up!*"

And Damon did, bits of ice and rock exploding from under the track links, snow and gravel showering to front and rear; he clutched from drive-slow through generate into reverse as fast as the magnets would allow and spun nearly in place, grinding in with his aft end scraping the cliff face and his nose stretched into cold space. The Big Eye opened involuntarily wide and saw nothing, *nothing* solid, just distant countryside spread like a map away, below.

A somasweep, nearly unconscious, ran over his top (Kienast hanging on tight enough to register orange on the strain gauges) flanks and rear (no damage, but scratches on the tail, and pressure against hard rock) to the belly and tracks.

He felt gravel shift, just faintly, beneath the starboard track. Rock crunched louder. Damon held dead still.

That eye was blind and Kienast gripped the turret. Damon widened the Big Eye's field to the limit, twisted up the audio pickups until his own somasounds were a crackling roar and Kienast's heartbeat pounded like automatic fire.

Stones passed his field of view, rolling down and out. Gravel tickled, feathered the edge of the starboard tread.

Then there was a noise as of tearing cloth, loud as an erupting nuclear until Damon's audio limiters cut in; he realized then that it was not a very great noise at all, no louder than another track rolling past. A cloud of white dust and snow drifted across the Big Eye.

"Kienast?"

"It's . . . gone, Damon."

"The path?"

"What else is up here?"

"Let me see."

"Oh. Yeah." He let go of the turret. Damon rotated it, slowly; he couldn't feel anything now under half the starboard tread.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The path was surely enough gone. It had crumbled away cleanly for eight meters. Damon was barely that long. The distance was made infinite.

"Better ahead of us than under us," Kienast said, his voice firm again, that untraceable element in it again. He climbed down Damon's portside flank, leaned against it. Gravel shifted beneath the starboard tread. Damon shouted a protest.

"Sorry. I am sorry."

"What now?"

"Well. Ye don't unfold wings, or maybe have jump-jets . . . no, don't answer that.

"We can't go forward, then. And it's a fair bet if we go back we'll have to race collapsing gravel. I saw a man in a four-by try that, once, up here; he was fast. The stones were faster."

—If men lose to wartracks when they meet, what do the tracks fear?

"So forward we canna, backward we canna, up is silly."

"Can we go down?"

"Well . . ." Kienast looked over the brink, and kicked at a rock; it bounced once and twice and shot into void with no sound of impact. He turned and looked up, past the cliff they had already scaled, at the low and heavy late-afternoon clouds. The sky blinked with unseen lightning.

"Well, *well,*" the man said, pulled a ration bar from his pocket and bit off a corner. "Have ye got some rope? Cable, or any sort of wire to spare?"

—Only the—

"No."

"No, I hadn'a seen any."

—But there is the—

**(GRID HOTGRID ANNOT 46**

**(ANNOT:::warning this data is coded/exclusive secret/and not to be released under any circumstances)**

"Nothing to do but try, though . . . how far can ye fall, Damon? I mean, how much shock can ye soak up?"

"Not that much."

"Neither can I." He began climbing Damon's side, ignoring the small cascade of stones from above. "Are ye ready, then?"

"Wait. There's some coaxial—a few meters . . ."

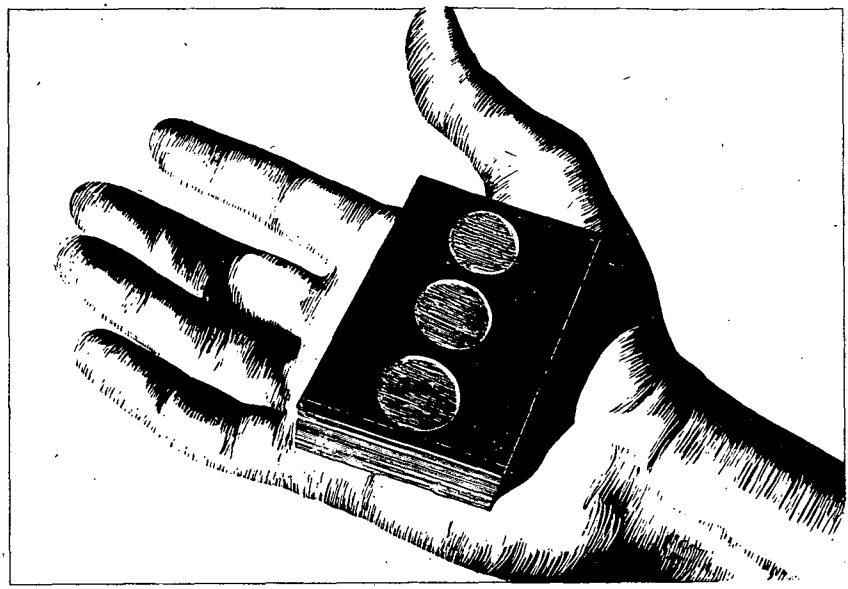
**(GRID: HOTGRID ANNOT 46)**

—But I am Damon, *and I override*!

**(RETURN)**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



". . . behind a panel, inside the cabin. Port side."

"Will it hold your weight?" He was already climbing inside the hull, squeezing through the gap between rockwall and rear slope.

"I doubt it."

"One wonderful thing about doubt," the man said from inside the hull. "It leaves room for the most marvelous errors of fact."

Kienast grabbed up the green coil and his starcaster; if he noticed the box on the end of the cable he gave no sign of it. He slid out of the hull and hopped to the ground, slung the 'caster, and began examining the Key.

"Here, what's this?" He fingered the box, turned it buttons-side-up.

**(INTERLOCK:::CLOSED: CALL KEYWORD)**

"Looks like controls."

**(KEYWORD: it is a far far better thing I do than I)**

"Looks like *track* controls."

**(COUNTDOWN:::44.43.42.)**

Kienast squeezed and twisted a coupling, snapping box from cable with one movement. He gave the box a curious look, then tossed it over the cliff.



LICENSED TO [illegible]
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**(BREAK BREAK INTERLOCK:::OPEN)**

A hot spark leaped inside Damon, and he was alive again.

In the heavy sky, thunder rolled again and wind gusted whining.

"I'll get to work," Kienast said.

—Just like that? He finds it and throws it away, *just like that?*

Relief met suspicion in a thick forest of puzzlement.

Kienast was looping the cable around one of Damon's forward drive wheels; then he coupled the two ends and tugged at the joint. There did not seem to be any way he could have hidden or secretly saved the box.

—What would Programmer-Damon have said?

The Programmer held the Key loosely, his other hand on Machine-Damon's flank, lightly, gently, and he

**(POSTWIRED JUMP: AVPROC**
**(BYPASS: GATE 2sec)**

Damon listened to the wind and to Kienast, who sang a song about moonrise and urgency as he slung the cable over his shoulder.

But the Programmer held the box with his thumb on the Goof Button, and he said "This

**(POSTWIRED JUMP: AVPROC**
**(BYPASS: GATE 2sec)**

"And we'll give the boys a bloody good ride—" Kienast had changed tunes.

Damon shuttered his eyes to block out the superfluous data and—*reached*—

An arc jumped in his mind, overloading his sensory gear, edging into something the tracks were taught but seldom learned:

Pain.

As if torn circuits were never to mend, as if when core broke or blew it were never to knit.

But Programmer-Damon had shown him, once—

"All right, Damon. Tell me why the Key is kept inside the track."

"Command Protocols," Damon replied, the beginnings of inflection in his voice. "One: loss of internal control function. Two: loss


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of essential navigation function. Three: override of a track taken and reprogrammed by the enemy—"

—One, madness. Two, blindness. Three, death and treason.

"Correct. Understand, Damon: the Key is for use by your superiors. But the Key is death, Damon. The Key is *this*."

The thumb of God came down, a contact closing, bright sparks burning in Damon's mind. Or wherever they burned; he was permitted to wonder, just now. It was all the input he had, just now.

No light, no heat, no groundpressure. Somasweep showed nothing at all; not merely a zero-data reading, but an absence of reading, as if nothing existed to be scanned, as if no circuit existed to scan. Damon was alone in a cloud of metal and energy that had no solidity of metal nor pulsebeat of power.

Alone, dead, helpless, afraid.

He caught himself closing the Destruct again, and held very, very still. He understood, all at once, why Kienast had discarded the box so casually; to him, the bit of cable was lifeline. The box meant only the control of a machine, to no end save to die having mastered it.

—But to me . . . I almost . . .

"I think we're ready," Kienast shouted, braced against the cable. "Ye're fifteen, maybe twenty degrees off true downhill—"

"Eighteen."

"Ye've got the idea. Be watching that, now; there's nary place for me to stand and tug ye back. We've got to get ye true downhill, or flip-and-over ye'll go. Power won't do; I've seen that tried as well, and ye'd break up th' ground and drop us straight to—*well*. If the path holds, and this string holds, and about sixty million probably-nots hold—well, well. Ye worried, Damon?"

"I'm not afraid," he said instantly. It was programmed deep in the Human Intermode Package that he answer that.

"That's good. When ye're not afraid of dying, ye can worry on verra much more important things." He spoke with his usual ease, and with that other strange timbre.

But Damon recognized the sound now. Tracks registered the feeling differently, when at all, and he had not heard it often from humans. He did not mingle with the support infantry that often, but sometimes . . .

He knew it from them. It was the high tremor of withheld human fear.

The wind howled higher, and Kienast held out a hand, palm



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

upward. "Snowflakes. Right on time, too." He wiped the hand on his coat and hitched the cable up on his shoulder. "Put to it, then!"

The man began pulling. Damon tapped just the barest bit of power to the tracks, just enough to break up static friction, then unclutched them. He felt himself shifting, grinding a fraction of a degree at a time with the man's steady pull.

"Straight'n, tha mech," Kienast was growling under his heavy breath. "P't y'sel daown'ard—ha'nt I seen death enow an hard stone?"

*Clink* went the links of Damon's treads. The Big Eye showed him a red line where his nose pointed and a green one for the target attitude—and the lines crept together, closer—rock popped and, grumbled—closer—

The lines met, began flashing.

"Now, Kienast!"

The man stopped, gasping, sank to his knees. "An' damn me for an thicklid rock driller, ye'd a'got nary a milli more."

Kienast got up, uncoupled the cable and threw it away. "Now, let me aboard; and down we go."

He climbed inside, tapped the wall as a signal. Damon slipped in the clutches, ever so gently, and rolled forward just half the span of a tread link, then a span. The edge rounded beneath him, then held firm.

Damon crawled ahead, another span, then two, then three—then paused. Senors said he was balanced just a hair toward the hill.

Half a span further, and he began to tilt forward, silently in the whistling air.

Kienast whispered something unintelligible.

And then, tipping down, the path broke from beneath the edge of his starboard track. His nose came down hard, treads slammed to the ground, and Damon started sliding on stone and ice. He shifted to one side over the uneven surface and gathered speed.

He double-clutched the tracks to generate, balancing the resistances, dragging one track hard until he was aimed straight downhill once more. At an oblique angle, he might grind to a stop; but more likely he'd flip over, shoot out into the air like a falling rock.

Pebbles spattered his glacis like chaingun fire, stony edges gouged at his tracks and belly, a dozen indiks screamed for his attention: overheating here and arcing there and unavoidable



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

obstacle CRUNCH! Something felt loose, inside, a deadly sign—but no, that would be Kienast's body, no time to spare to check on him or even to listen to him.

Damon bounced airborn, came down with a shock that chipped his turret gearing; the crossbar freewheeled and a short circuit fired the screambeam in mad bursts that started little avalanches all around them.

And now the Big Eye executed an override and forced him to look forward, showed him outlined in yellow-orange-red-doublered a boulder, black and a hundred tons, dead in his path.

He turned the tracks. They obeyed him but physics ignored them; they flexed, fighting momentum like fate.

**50 METERS,** the Big Eye noted, helpfully suggesting **EVADE.**

**45 METERS**

**40 METERS** and a crosshair quadrated the boulder, the Eye having run out of things to say.

But—Damon let go control of the tracks and unlocked the fire-control board. He toed the rollrockets in and without waiting for an **ACQUIRED** signal fired full belt, eighty-mm Vipers rising and latching and burning two by two, the hawk-and-spit sound of the feed and fire lost in the downhill-express world. And three things happened at once:

The boulder disappeared in a cloud of smoke and dust and snow.

Damon's treads left the ground, ski-jumping from a flat slab of rock.

Exhaust gas compressed in the bent rocket housing burst the tube, detonating the next armed rocket in the rack.

Damon felt a shattering blow, as hard as the damned splayshell that had started all this, then a smash and rip of steel on earth as he went past and over the remnants of the blasted boulder, and then the blue-white blaze of a power rupture once more took consciousness away from him just when things most needed his attention—

**(POWERDOWN PROCEDURE**
**(CONSCIOUS OVERLAY:::TEMP INACTIVE**
**(REGROWTH SYSTEMS:::ON**
**(REGROWTH:::CONDUIT STM16)**

Thought slept. Action continued.

**(CONSOBSERVE TTR 14//REPAIR IN PROGRESS**
**(MANUAL EXTERNAL REPAIRS PROCEEDING: INITIATE PROTOCOLS**
**(REPAIRS ADEQUATE FOR MINFUNC: EXECUTE CXPROC 73**


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**FLAG 73//via voder//thank you, engineer, for your service. I feel much better now and wish to return to my duties.)**

Power flowed through dormant assemblies.

**(CONSCIOUS OVERLAY:::ACTIVE/REORGANIZING**

**(COLDSTART PROCEDURE**

**(ENVIRONMENTAL WARNING//lotemp//PRIORITY)**

Damon awoke to the flicker of an Enviro signal: he was dangerously cold, it said, and in bad trouble.

His thoughts were disordered; hot storage was empty. Cold—cold—coldstart. That was it. Hot memory disappeared in a power outage. There was some reason he was here, somewhere he had to go . . .

**(PROTOCOL: SEEKLIGHT)**

. . . but some reason not to go, not just yet. Thoughts swam in his mind, searching for proper addresses in memory. He began a file search, to discover what had been in his mind. And since he could not think for himself, deeper systems thought for him.

**(EMERGENCY PROTOCOL: SEEKLIGHT**

**(OVERRIDE: EXECUTE)**

Imposed on the endless snow was a directional crosshair. A ping came from the scanner and a green oval appeared . . . out there . . . and he was rolling all unwilled toward the primary beacons of the battlefield to come, rolling blind save for the true and immutable vision of hardwired instruments.

—No more trouble. I'll appear alone, I was lost and made my way by some miracle . . .

—*What miracle?*

**(MALFUNCTION INDICATED: OVERRIDE**

**(CONSCIOUS MODE:::SHIFT [TEMP CUTOUT] :FLAG 30k**

***(FLAG: rest now you'll be all right you'll be)***

Winter night closed in, enfolded him, shutting out the cold, sealing away the strange hurt feelings from all over the hull. Powering down his sense of loss.

But Programmer-Damon had shown him . . . and an enemy soldier named Kienast had shown him . . .

Green electric fire jumped from point to point. Solder melted and wiring flowed where hands—*human* hands—had worked to rejoin conduit. For a moment he stood still, wondering if he would move any more, and then he was turned round and racing back through the storm, seeking again with his instruments, but this time seeking not aid and comfort, but the enemy.

And suddenly Kienast lay before him, folded inside his coat, so



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

close on the slick ground Damon nearly crushed him. Damon twisted down into IR, found the man alive but not conscious, and cold, cold.

"Shan!"

—How did I remember that?

Snow blew across the man; it covered a shoulder, a boot. Damon shouted his name twice more, wishing for hands, for some way to reach.

Then he put the emergency beacon on audio: a pure tone close to the resonant frequency of the human ear canal, a sound no man living could ignore for long.

He played the note against the enveloping wind, against the weather, the dark and the cold, at the man on the ground. He turned up gain until indiks lit for speakers and amplifier.

And the man stirred.

"*Kienast*!" and the name shook the mountains and split the night open.

Kienast got to his knees, to his feet. He held a pair of pliers and did not release them. Damon looked closer and saw that the metal was frozen to the flesh.

"Magna . . . Mater, ye got y'rself dinged up. Dinn' I tell ye . . . y'were in th' country of th' enemy?"

He climbed in the hatch, closed it, and fell on the floor inside. Unstirring, but still breathing. Blood still flowing.

Damon buttoned what systems he could and once more set out by the light of the Big Eye. He could not wait for morning; he was torn up outside and in, and every minute brought them closer to failure.

—Go and maybe die, or stay and die for certain. Here we go again.

They were very much back where they started, with the problem of their mutual survival. There was still, despite everything, a war on.

If one of them didn't make it, all this would be easily explained by a lie that neither military would doubt or want to doubt.

And if they both should die, it would be an interesting puzzle for the finders. *Who*, they would wonder, *captured who*?

—Neither.

—And both.

And, with the abandonment of those lesser fears, Damon returned to the important worry of returning himself and Kienast to life.



LICENSED TO KINDLE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ON WHAT REALLY GOES ON AT A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION
**by Darrell Schweitzer**

*Dear Editor,*

*I have been a fan since the early 1950's, but have never been to a convention . . . maybe there are others out there like me. . . . I can't get my husband to take me unless I can tell him, in general, what goes on at a Science Fiction Convention. He wants to know if it's like a boat show, where there are booths manned by avid salesmen trying to sell their wares . . . or if it's like a Shriners' Convention, where everyone gets drunk and has fun. And what's the masquerade ball like? And what's the use of staying two days if you can walk through and see it in an afternoon?*

*Sincerely,*

*Mrs. Dolores Ryan*
*Santa Barbara CA*

Any editor who prints notices of forthcoming science fiction conventions (or "cons" as the attendees call them) gets letters like the one above. The questions raised so succinctly by our legitimately bewildered correspondent deserve an answer, since no one can be expected to know what such affairs are like without having attended one. A quick look at the circulation figures reveals this magazine is read by about 100,000 people, and, since no SF convention has ever drawn more than roughly 6000, and the average one draws somewhere in the middle hundreds, it is safe to assume that most of you are in the same position as Mrs. Ryan.

Science fiction conventions are held in hotels, usually in the native city of the group sponsoring the con, although in recent years high prices have caused a trend toward sites in outlying districts. Thus Philcon (Philadelphia) last year was really in King of Prussia, Balticons are well beyond the Baltimore city limits, and there was one Lunacon (No! *Not* on Luna, but sponsored by the Lunarians, a New York club) in New Jersey. Unless it's a holiday weekend the convention will usually start early Friday evening and break up late Sunday afternoon. Attendees (no, that's too formal a term—fans is what I mean) begin arriving late Friday afternoon usually, with the greatest influx between 5 and 7 P.M. The first thing you do is register, both with the convention and the hotel. Conventions often


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

book a hotel solid, so it is best to reserve your rooms in advance. If you have pre-registered with the convention itself, you can not only get your room at the cheaper convention rate, but often admission to the convention is lower too. You go to the convention registration desk (*not* the same one you went to for your room—please don't confuse the clerks any more than they already are! Conventions of any kind are hectic to hotel personnel, so be nice.), and either pay the door price, or tell them you are pre-registered. You will be given a name badge and a program. Name badges are not only to show that you have registered, but they are an extremely convenient way of finding people you may know by name but not by sight, such as a famous author, or a correspondent.

Like a boat show with salesmen hawking wares, or a Shriners' bash where they give speeches and get drunk together? Answer: a bit of both, and more. The boat show aspect is confined to a "huckster room" in which you can find a wide variety of science fiction items for sale, new and old, including many small press books, fanzines, and other items not available on most newstand or in general bookstores. This, however, is only a minor part of the overall setup.

A few conventions have formal programming Friday night, a speech or two, a panel discussion, and the like; but more often there are open parties and a film program. Some people go exclusively to the films, some to the parties, and a lot to some of both. If the film program is good, it may include rare items seldom seen elsewhere, or perhaps the premiere of some major new movie. (*Destination Moon, Watership Down, A Boy And His Dog,* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* all were seen first at SF cons.) You may want to take time out from the partying for one or two.

Where are the parties? "In the con suite," is the answer you'll always get. This is a set of rooms rented by the convention committee for this very purpose. Booze, sodas, and munchies are free. I don't know about Shriners' conventions, but at SF cons there is a lot of drinking, yet few people get overtly *drunk*, which is all for the better. You'd miss the fun that way. People come to convention parties not to kill excess brain cells, but to meet and talk with their favorite authors, and their friends—many of whom they have made at conventions.

And so on into the small hours of the morning. (The con suite will probably close about 4 A.M. Some room parties, private or otherwise, could break up only for breakfast.) If you are a serious science fiction collector, you may want to get up early Saturday morning because all the best bargains vanish from the huckster room within fifteen


LICENSED TO UN2.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

minutes of its opening, but otherwise don't worry about sleeping late. Formal programming will start about 11 A.M.: more speeches by authors, panels, maybe a slide show, maybe several events going on simultaneously in different parts of the hotel so you can pick and choose. Topics may range from what's new in SF publishing to reminiscences of The Good Old Days to scientific advances to whatever a particular author thinks is important enough to give a speech about. Unless the schedule is running badly behind, there is always a question and answer session after each item.

Unless there is a banquet, which would be held Saturday evening in most cases, the convention will break for supper, and afterwards there may be more parties and films, or perhaps a few more program items, depending on the whim of the con committee. Saturday night is also a common time for the masquerade.

A convention masquerade is not like a costume ball, where everyone comes in costume. It is more of a competition, where a few people enter for a variety of prizes—most beautiful, most humorous, best character from a book, most eldritch, etc. Most costumes are home made, but this doesn't mean they look cheap. A very high level of craftsmanship is expected, at least from the winners, and some costumes are so spectacular, so convincing, that sometimes you wonder if that green thing that just slithered by *is really a costume*. . . . Masquerades are always fun to watch, even if you don't enter, and in any case it is best to see a few before you try.

After the masquerade, or after the supper break if there isn't a masquerade, the parties start again, the Saturday night ones typically being the biggest and longest lasting. Sunday morning the program starts up again, and often the guest of honor speech is delivered that afternoon, after which people may linger for hours, talking with their friends.

See it all in a day? *No*! Unless you stay the full length of the convention you'll miss a lot because things are continuously happening. The most stimulating panel, memorable conversation, or enjoyable movie might not be until the third day.

To add a couple more questions: Are science fiction conventions worth going to? Answer: Yes, very much so. You'll probably go back for more. Some fans claim it is a way of life. Who goes to cons? Answer: anyone who wants to. You don't have to be invited. All are welcome, regardless of age, background, or species. You will find the people at conventions interesting, friendly, and more than willing to accept you as one of themselves. You can hardly *help* but have a good time!


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

Meet your favorite writers, artists, and editors at an SF con(vention) near you soon. Send an addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) when you write cons. Call me at (301) 794-7718 if you have trouble contacting a con—or just to chat. If my machine answers, I'll call back. If you're planning a con, let me know. There's no charge for listing. For a longer, later list of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE at: 10015 Greenbelt Road #101, Seabrook MD 20801. Most of these phone numbers are residential, so evening may be the best time to call. At cons, my identity is "Filthy Pierre" (who, disguised as a mild-mannered columnist...).

**UniCon.** For info, write: **Box 263, College Park MD 20740.** Or phone: **(301) 794-7374** (10 A.M. to 10 P.M. only, not collect). Con will be held in: Washington DC (if city and/or state omitted, same as in address) on 20-22 July 1979. Guests will include: Robert Bloch. Washington's summer convention moves downtown, to the Shoreham-Americana Hotel.

**DeepSouthCon, (504) 861-2602.** New Orleans LA, 20-22 July. R. A. Lafferty and Jerry Page. This is the annual traveling Southern con, complete with 'round-the-clock party room.

**Conebulus, (315) 471-7003.** Syracuse NY, 20-22 July. At the Thruway Hilton. $10 for 3 days.

**OKon, (918) 742-7214,** Tulsa, OK, 21-22 July. Jack Williamson & Bob (Cold Cash War) Asprin.

**FilkCon, Box 9911, Little Rock AR 72219. (501) 568-0938.** Chicago IL, 27-29 July. Celebrating SF folksongs. Bring your guitar and songs and join in, or just come listen.

**August Party, (301) 937-3040.** Washington DC, 3-5 Aug. The last in this series of cons that are about ⅓ Star Trek and ⅔ general SF. Last year brought out dazzling costumes.

**Ozymandias, (416) 231-0224.** Toronto, Ont., 10-12 Aug. Alexei & Cory Panshin, Moshe Feder.

**SeaCon, Box 428, Latham NY 12110. (518) 783-7673.** Brighton (near London) England, 23-27 Aug. The World SF Convention for 1979. Not much time left to arrange to go, so hurry.

**NorthAmeriCon, Box 58009, Louisville KY 40258. (502) 636-5340.** 30 Aug.-3 Sept. Frederik Pohl, Lester Del Rey, and some guy named Scithers. With the WorldCon abroad, this is the continental convention. Something for everybody, including a moonlight river cruise.

**RoVaCon, Box 774, Christianburg VA 24073. (703) 389-9400.** Roanoke VA, 28-30 Sept.

**MosCon, Box 9141, Moscow ID 83843. (208) 882-8781.** 28-30 Sept. Robert A. Heinlein (health permitting) and Alex Schomburg. A rare con in the Empty Quarter of the continent.

**World Fantasy Con, 43 Kepler, Pawtucket RI 02860.** (401) 722-4738. Providence RI, 12-14 Oct. F. B. Long, M. Whelan. The fantasy fan's WorldCon, a tradition after five years.

**Sci-Con, Box 6259, Newport News VA 23606.** Hampton VA, 12-14 Oct. Kelly Freas. Note the change in the Guest of Honor, to David Gerrold (the creator of Star Trek's tribbles).

**MileHiCon, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. (303) 433-9774.** 26-28 Oct. J. Williamson, C. Stubbs.

**AcadianaCon, 815 E. Railroad, Broussard LA 70518. (318) 837-1769.** Lafayette LA, 26-28 Oct. David Gerrold. The emphasis will be on Cajun food, music, and culture. Sounds intriguing.

**Roc*Kon, contact FilkCon (above).** Little Rock AR, 26-28 Oct. 1979. Gordon R. Dickson.

**NorEasCon II, Box 46, MIT PO, Boston MA 02139.** 29 Aug.-1 Sept. 1980. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, and Bruce Pelz. The World SF convention for 1980, back in Boston after 9 years.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ITCH ON THE BULL RUN

## by Sharon Webb

**art: Alex Schomburg**

*. . . or, The Further Adventures of Terra Tarkington, Space Nurse . . .*

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Jan. 2

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

This may be the last time you hear from me. I am doomed. Just as beautiful Dr. Brian-Scott and I were beginning an ardent alli-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ance—Armageddon.

Yes, it's true. When I signed up with the Interstellar Nurses' Corps, I signed my life away. I am writing to you from a plague ship. There's been no official word, but where there's steam (to coin a phrase) there's a reactor.

I just got back from a week's pass (Earth time, not Bull Run time), and found that I had fallen into a nest of pestilence. All of the Aldeberan nurses were hissing about it, but they kept lapsing from Standard into their native tongue so I couldn't get any details. I asked one of the Hyadean orderlies about it, but all he'd do was shake his head and jiggle the crease where his nose ought to be. He wouldn't say a *word,* Carmie; and he's a terrible gossip. When Glockto is at a loss for words, it is *serious*. I did find out that the chief epidemiologist, old Dr. Kelly-Bach, is stricken. Word is that he picked up the plague from an Aurigan patient. Dr. Kelly-Bach's wife, Olga the Grim, is sure to be next. And after Olga? Carmie, I am going to die. And I don't even know what the symptoms are yet.

When you read in the medical journals of the disease that decimated Nath Outpost, think of me, Carmie, and weep.

Yours in dissolution,
Terra

---

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Jan. 2

Gladiola Tarkington
45 Subsea
Petroleum City
Gulf of Mexico 233433111 United Earth, Sol

Dear Mom,

Everything is fine here, but boring. I just got back from a week's pass. I'm afraid I was terribly extravagant; I spent the week on Hyades IV and bought a Snuggie. I can't wear it on the ship, of course, because Hyadean Snuggies are good for forty degrees below zero, but it will come in handy back on Earth if I ever get there.

Don't worry about the plague.

Love,
Terra


LICENSED MATERIAL
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Jan. 5

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

I told you that I was going to die, but it is much worse than that. *Much worse.* I am to be flayed alive—victim of an insidious and malignant fungus.

We still don't have any official word, but that's because the official word has to come from Dr. Kelly-Bach, and he is in awful shape. Poor Dr. Kelly-Bach is still up and around, ministering to the sick; but his mind wanders, and his heart is not in his work. Carmie, you should see him. He has to wear thick gloves to keep from scratching his hide off. Olga tells me she has to restrain his hands every night, because if she didn't, he would wake up in the morning with most of his epidermis gone. The look in his eye is terrible, Carmie. Sort of maddened. And he moans and sighs a lot.

*There is no known cure, Carmie.* None. And it is definitely contagious. Only this morning, I found Olga smearing the end of her nose with a local anesthetic, but she said it didn't help much. To make matters worse, Glockto, the orderly, came in about then and begged some for his crease.

Carmie, it is so depressing that I am nearing catatonia. Just when Dr. Brian-Scott and I were developing such a fulfilling relationship, disaster strikes. We will be cut down in our prime.

I know that if he is stricken first, I will stand by him. But what if I'm first? Would he want me if my skin were gone? They say that beauty is only skin deep, but that's a lie, Carmie.

There is only one thing left to do. I've got to figure out a way to get us off this tub.

Machinatingly yours,
Terra

---

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nath Orbit

Jan. 7

Gladiola Tarkington
45 Subsea
Petroleum City
Gulf of Mexico 233433111 United Earth, Sol

Dear Mom,

I'm not sick. I never said I was sick. I don't see why you're worried, because I'm fine.

The Hyadean Snuggie does not carry disease. The only diseases we get around here come from the patients.

I have applied for a transfer, but they said I couldn't have it until Olga Kelly-Bach's skin grows back.

Your loving daughter,
Terra

---

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Jan. 9

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Well, they wouldn't let me transfer off this tin coffin, but I've beaten them at their game. I volunteered for special assignment on Pleiades II, and Dr. Brian-Scott is going too. It seems that one of the Pleiades II Mothers is sick. Her egg production slowed down to zero, and we have to find out why. The Pleiades II population is on the decline anyway, and they can't afford to lose a Mother. It sounds like an interesting case, and it sure beats terminal pruritus.

Olga is a *mass* of excoriation, and it is better not to describe the condition of poor Dr. Kelly-Bach. I really fear for his sanity, Carmie. He is so testy, you just can't stand to be around him. (If you wanted to be around him.)

We thought the Aldeberans were immune; but just this morning,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one of Dr. Qotemire's scales fell out of his tail during surgery. He seemed awfully distressed about it, and the Aldeberan nurse who was assisting him turned such a pale blue that I thought she would faint. I'm getting off this tub just in time, Carmie. It's one thing to see the disease in humans and Hyadeans, but it's altogether something else to contemplate Dr. Qotemire's defoliation. I don't think I could bear that. It's hard enough to look at Dr. Qotemire when he's in health.

Terra

P.S. How's this for an itinerary? Tomorrow we take the shuttle to Hyades IV and then the express to Pleiades II. Our port-of-entry is Seven Sisters—the only Pleasure Dome in *light-years*! We'll spend the night at the Kubla Khan and then off to see our patient.

Yours in anticipation,
Terra

---

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Jan. 9

Gladiola Tarkington
45 Subsea
Petroleum City
Gulf of Mexico 233433111 United Earth, Sol

Dear Mom,

My skin is fine. You worry too much. I worry about your worrying about me.

They won't let me come home, Mom. They're sending Dr. Brian-Scott and me to Pleiades II to see a patient there. But don't be concerned. It's probably not true what they say about the Seven Sisters Pleasure Dome.

Much love,
Terra

Pleiades II Express
17th Relay 800880008

Jan. 10



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Life is bleak. There is no shining dawn for me, Carmie. No rosy edge. Dr. Brian-Scott is stricken with the fungus.

He twitched all the way on the shuttle, and now he's beginning to scratch. Just when our love begins to flower, it is nipped (to coin a phrase) cruelly in the bud. I cannot express to you the way I feel.

Yours in desolation,
Terra

---

Pleasure Dome
Pleiades II 456765453 Pleiades

Jan. 11

Gladiola Tarkington
45 Subsea
Petroleum City
Gulf of Mexico 233433111 United Earth, Sol

Dear Mom,

You shouldn't get so excited about things, Mom. The Pleasure Dome is really a big nothing. Absolutely tame and harmless.

I'm sure the police will let us go soon.

And don't worry. Even though Dr. Brian-Scott is growing worse by the minute, I am still fine.

Love and kisses,
Terra

---

Pleasure Dome
Pleiades II 456765453 Pleiades

Jan. 11

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Carmie,

I am being held prisoner in the Seven Sisters Pleasure Dome. When we arrived last night, Dr. Brian-Scott couldn't stop scratching while we were going through customs and the officials kept giving us funny looks. About the time I thought we were through, these two huge beings came and put us under arrest. (I say "beings" because I don't know *what* they were—they were wearing bulky decontam. suits.)

Well, they marched us off through a sort of tunnel into our cell. It looks like an ordinary Floatel room, but make no mistake, Carmie, it is really a cell. We are locked in. We are being fed and cared for after a fashion, but we've had no physical contact with anybody. A health servo came in and took samples of us though.

In between scratching, Dr. Brian-Scott called the embassy. Everyone was very polite, but adamant. We have to stay here until we get clearance from Pleiades II Health.

So now I am prisoner in a Pest Hole. Who would have thought it would come to this, Carmie? Have you ever been arrested? Have you ever spent the night in a Pleasure Dome cell with a man with the itch? Believe me, it is no fun. No fun at all.

The health servo told us that Aurigan fungus is not touched in any way by any drug known to the civilized galaxy.

What the health servo didn't tell us was that any known pleasurable stimulus makes it worse.

Do you know how helpless it makes you feel to see the man you love writhing on a jelly bed and pleading, "Do something, Terra. *Do something*"?

Well, what could *I* do? He's the doctor.

Grimly yours,
Terra

---

Pleasure Dome
Pleiades II 456765453 Pleiades

Jan. 12

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We have been freed. The health servo came in a while ago and told us.

What he said was, "You are free to leave the dome. Do not attempt to return or you will be executed."

Can you imagine, Carmie? Here we are on a mission of mercy and that's the treatment we get. I can't wait to get out of here.

Pleiades II Health said it would be all right to visit our patient outside the dome. It seems that there's a lot of fungus out there anyway, and the natives are immune to most of it, including the Aurigan variety.

If I were not the dedicated professional I am, I wouldn't bother to help the Pleiades Mother. But as you know, Carmie, I am dedicated to the end.

Besides, we don't have anyplace else to go. They won't let us board the express because we're contaminated. We are doomed to wander the hostile surface of Pleiades II—perhaps forever.

Yours into the wilderness,
Terra

---

Mother's Oviporium
Vicious Swamp
Pleiades II 352344480

Jan. 13

Gladiola Tarkington
45 Subsea
Petroleum City
Gulf of Mexico 233433111 United Earth, Sol

Dear Mom,

Well, here we are at the Oviporium. We've seen our patient and Dr. Brian-Scott and I are going to start treatment after lunch, if he is still up and around.

I am fine.

You would be amazed at the sex habits on Pleiades II. Absolutely amazed.

Yours in wonder,
Terra



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mothers' Oviporium
Vicious Swamp
Pleiades II 352344480 Pleiades

Jan. 13

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

I found out why they call it a Pleasure Dome. The only pleasure that anyone could conceivably have on this planet is under that dome. Outside, it rains all the time. *All the time*. Everything is musty and mildewy.

The Pleiades II Mother is in bad shape. When we got here, she was curled up in a kind of spastic ball. Since you've led a sheltered life back on Earth, Carmie, you've probably forgotten your Alien Physiology. The Mother is about three meters long and she looks a lot like a millipede. She's stopped laying her eggs and she seems to be in pain. Of course, it's a little hard to be sure, because she's completely blind, deaf, and dumb.

After a while she began to writhe. Her groomers panicked. They stood around whimpering and twiddling their feelers while Dr. Brian-Scott stood around and scratched. Then he did an internal and said, "I think it's (scratch, scratch) a mechanical obstruction (scratch, scratch) of the ovipositor."

I thought that was interesting, and I looked at her tail; but Dr. Brian-Scott said I was looking at the wrong end. The Mother's ovipositor is just under her mouth. (Can you imagine, Carmie?)

Then he said, "We'd better (scratch, scratch) put on protective clothing (scratch, scratch)."

He said that when he finished dilating her ovipositor, the eggs would start rolling out. "As soon as they do, she'll start squirting liters of fluid from the pores in her sides to coat the eggs."

So I have to go put on this plasticine suit to keep the juice off of me. I'll let you know what happens.

Obstetrically yours,
Terra



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mothers' Oviporium
Vicious Swamp
Pleiades II 352344480 Pleiades

Jan. 14

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 206548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

I am ecstatic! You'll never guess what happened. When we got suited up, Dr. Brian-Scott dilated the Mother's ovipositor and sure enough, these white eggs started rolling out in a steady stream. She'd catch each one with her anterior legs, and then she'd roll it down her body all the way to her tail. All the while, this brown fluid kept pouring out of openings in the side of her body. By the time the eggs got to her tail they were brown—completely coated with the fluid.

Meanwhile, poor Dr. Brian-Scott was abjectly miserable inside the plasticine suit. It simply *exacerbated* his condition to an unbearable extreme.

While he danced around on one foot and then the other and scratched and scratched with a manic expression on his face, I got to wondering about why the Mother had to squirt all that stuff over the eggs.

He stopped scratching and dancing long enough to say, "It prevents the eggs from rotting. It's so damp here the eggs would be destroyed by fungus in no time."

And that's when I conceived this brilliant idea.

I said, "Well, do you suppose that juice would do any good for the Aurigan fungus?"

The effect on him was amazing. He stood completely still like he had turned to plexiglas or something. Then, after the longest time, he leaped up in the air and began to rip his clothes off.

It was unbelievable. There he was, stripped to his itchy skin in front of everybody. Then he reached out and splashed handfuls of that brown syrupy mess all over himself. As he did it, he made little happy moans and then splashed some more. Carmie, he practically *embraced* the Mother.

I can't tell you how mortified I was. Fortunately, the Mother was blind, deaf, and dumb, or there's no telling what her reaction would



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been. I guess the groomers all thought it was part of the treatment.

But it made me mad. He could have killed himself. A more unscientific experiment I have never seen; he could have at least tried a little patch first. Carmie, he's lucky that what was left of his hide didn't come off.

Well, after a while, he was completely brown like the eggs and he had this *beatific* smile on his face.

And when I saw that smile, I stopped being mortified.

Then he said (I remember his every word), "I love you, Terra."

So we're bringing back *containers* of the Mother Juice so we can cure the plague. The Port Authorities say we can board the express if we've both been treated.

I feel like Madame Curie.

Majestically yours,
Terra

---

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Jan. 16

Gladiola Tarkington
45 Subsea
Petroleum City
Gulf of Mexico 233433111 United Earth, Sol

Dear Mom,

You don't need to come here to see about me. *I'm fine.* I really wish you wouldn't call Dr. Kelly-Bach just now, since he's still weak from the plague.

We all took the cure, and Dr. Brian-Scott says that the brown stains may come off in a few months.

In the meantime, I am going to be a student. In view of my interest in the reproductive habits of the Pleiades II Mothers, Dr. Brian-Scott says he is going to teach me all about the most interesting reproductive habits in the galaxy.

Studiously yours,
Terra



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE MIGRATION OF DARKNESS

Each evening, shortly after sunset,
darkness covers the land.
  Having mystified thinkers for millenia,
  the mechanism for this occurrence
  has now been identified: migration.
Darkness, it has been found, is composed
of an almost infinite number of particles,
which roost and reproduce up north
where they have fewer natural enemies:
  Forest fires, lampposts, lasers, blazing sunlight,
  torches, candles, lighthouses, limelight, and electricity
  are relatively rare in the polar regions.
These lightweight bits of darkness
flock together and fly south each evening
to more fertile land in a never ending search
for an abundant food supply.
With the coming of the rising sun,
they return to their northern nesting grounds.
However, not all specks of darkness migrate.
Some that are less adventurous
  or downright lazy
choose to stay behind.
These covey together, in varying numbers,
seeking shelter from the strong sunlight
  by gathering under leafy trees, behind
  large rocks, and underneath umbrellas;
  hiding in alleys, between parked cars,
  in caves, and inside empty pockets.
These clusters are perceived by us as shadows.
They have a somewhat shorter lifespan
than those which migrate.

**—Peter Payack**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# WHERE ARE YOU, STEPHANIE TOBIN?

## by Juleen Brantingham

**art: Alex Schomburg**

*"A flight of crows or the entrails of a chicken shouldn't pack up their filing cabinets and steal away in the middle of the night. . . ."*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The chill, antiseptic atmosphere made me think we were having lunch inside a refrigerator. The carpet and the dark, heavy wood of the furniture did not destroy that impression—it was a luxury refrigerator. Mama always brought me to places like this the four or five times a year she came to the city to flagellate me for my sins.

"Do you remember Anne Marie Shoemaker?"

"No, I don't think so."

"You went to high school with her, for heaven's sake! Her father owns the newspaper and her mother does all that charity work. How could you forget Anne Marie Shoemaker? She was Homecoming Queen your senior year. Long blonde hair, a slight overbite—"

She searched my face for some sign of recognition but it was no use. In my senior year the only things I had cared about were the school newspaper and our plans for college—Mama's and mine. My friends thought it was funny that my mother and I would be going to college together. There was talk of apron strings. They didn't understand that the strings went the other way.

I shifted in my seat, wishing I could distract Mama by calling out to a friend but none of my friends would be caught dead there. It seemed to be a place made for parents to take their adult children to lunch. The waitress had given me a naughty wink when I ordered a Bloody Mary, then looked to Mama to see if she was going to cancel my order.

"Oh, Steff, don't tell me you don't remember. She had that graduation party out at the Old Mill and you were heartbroken when she didn't invite you. You cried for three days."

The only one who cried that year was Mama. Marriage to Daddy had been both those safe places, womb and tomb; and the shock of divorce had been almost more than she could take.

I remembered her tears. I did not remember an Anne Marie Shoemaker.

In desperation, because it seemed so important to her, I raised my eyebrows and looked surprised as if struck by returning memory. This time she didn't fall for it. She waited for more solid evidence and I had to search for words that could be applied to anyone.

"She dated that guy with wavy hair—"

"Jack Berry. And it wasn't wavy, it was frizzy. I used to wonder if he'd given himself a permanent and left something on too long. What a nice girl like Anne Marie ever saw in him— Well, anyway. She's getting married. Not to Jack Berry, thank heaven, and—"

I felt my eyes glazing over but Mama wouldn't notice. Not as long as I made the appropriate noises as she rattled on about the wedding


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plans of a perfect stranger.

It's a shame people don't believe in fairies any more. If they did it would be easy to explain about Mama and me. Obviously I'm a changeling. Some lazy fairy procrastinated until Stephanie Tobin and I were about eighteen years old.

Mama's memories and mine do not agree. How can two people live together for eighteen years and not remember *some* of the same things? Were we both blind? Did we speak two different languages?

During one of these duty lunches I was reminded of something and I mentioned it to Mama. When I was eight or nine an old man had rented a room from our next-door neighbor. He used to sit on the porch every sunny day, and I'd wave to him on my way home from school. It wasn't that I was a particularly friendly child. But he looked like a man who needed to be waved to.

One day an ambulance pulled away from the Bohannon house just as I stepped off the bus. I heard later that the old man died. He'd told Mrs. Bohannon to give his collection of toy soldiers to the little girl who always waved. I still have those toy soldiers, in a box I keep under my bed.

When I asked her about that man, Mama stared at me as if my hair had turned to snakes. She swore the Bohannons had never rented out their spare room. She didn't remember any toy soldiers.

She was probably right about the Bohannons. Looking at that polished woman across the table from me I could believe she had never lived in a neighborhood where people were forced to rent out their spare rooms. But who was that old man? And where had the toy soldiers come from?

"Steff, you *will* try to come home for the wedding, won't you? I know Anne Marie is dying to see you again. All your old friends will be there—"

There was real pain in her voice. It was hard to look at her. She had my mother's face. She spoke with her voice. But she was a stranger, a woman who accepted alimony as a right, who occupied her days with country clubs and bridge clubs and shopping. Where was the woman who swore with white-knuckled passion that she would not take another thing from "that man," not his money or his pity? One day I came home from school and this stranger was in her place.

Mama acts as if I were the one who changed. She wants me to be like her, to verify her choices. I am a disappointment to her.

She paid the bill and we walked outside. As Mama got into the cab I gave her some words that almost sounded like promises. They


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weren't, though. We both knew they weren't. Her brave, trembling smile cut me to pieces. She could go home satisfied.

I shivered once, violently, as I walked away from that restaurant. I felt as if I had escaped from a trap, a particularly nasty kind of trap with teeth and weight to mangle as it holds. I won't be the kind of woman she wants me to be. But I don't want to hurt the mother I remember.

"You're not the man I married."

The man shrugged. What could he say? The evidence was right there in front of him, on top of the television where she kept the twenty-year-old wedding picture, and in the mirror hanging slightly to one side. One showed a tall, slim man with dark hair and an expression of confidence. The other showed a bald man with a pot belly. The man in the mirror was smaller. Perhaps he shrank when the confidence leaked out—that is, if the two men had ever been the same. What could he say?

To walk those city streets was healing. I love this place. There are worlds here, all crushed together, rubbing elbows, ignoring each other. They are not even aware of me, though from time to time I try to enter one or another. Paradoxically, that gives me space and freedom. I need that. After one of those guilt sessions with Mama, the city looks strange and exciting again. I see it fresh. Even the dirt and the noise are enchanting. Maybe it's the lure of the sinful.

I walked down a street I had seen a hundred times before. The delicatessen, the book store, the drugstore. I counted them off like beads, trying not to laugh out loud. The city permits insanity, but the quieter the better. I was slightly punchy, trying not to remember Mama's smile, that note in her voice.

Then I stopped. Something jarred. What was it? I looked back.

Federal Bureau of Missing Persons.

What's that? It wasn't on my string before. Didn't that place used to be a floor-covering store? But I couldn't argue with the black letters on the door. They were very sure of themselves.

A *federal* bureau of missing persons? I didn't know we had one.

My hand was on the door before I was aware that I'd made a decision. I'd ask some questions. I might need to know about this some day.

But that wasn't it. I was lying to myself. I was still punchy.

In the back of the room a girl in a tight skirt and high heels was doing something at a filing cabinet. Her hair was teased and


ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bleached. Her style fit right in with the rest of the office. The walls were a grimy tan, the lights incandescent. There wasn't a computer terminal or electric typewriter in the place. At a desk behind the counter that ran the width of the room, a man with bifocals shuffled papers.

I cleared my throat. "I'd like to report a missing person," I said.

The girl ignored me. The man sighed and came over to the counter. He took a form from a stack beside him and clicked a ballpoint pen.

"Name?" he asked.

"Stephanie Tobin."

He wrote it down. "And the name of the missing person?"

"Stephanie Tobin."

He looked at me suspiciously over the top of his glasses.

"She's a—a cousin," I explained. "Our mothers both liked the name Stephanie."

He nodded and wrote that down, too.

The matter-of-factness was bringing me to earth again. My return brought a quiver of nerves. What was I doing here? The little man with bifocals didn't look as if he had a sense of humor.

There were dozens of blanks on that form. I gave him everything I could remember, up to the day I left home. My throat was dry.

Giving false information to the federal government—isn't that a crime? I wanted to leave but I was afraid the little man might call a cop. Well, at least when the investigators started looking for a Stephanie Tobin they would *find* one.

"And where was the missing person last seen?"

"I'm not sure. It was three years ago and—"

"Three *years*?" he barked.

"I just found out about it." It sounded weak even to me.

He ripped the form in half and dropped it, presumably in a waste basket behind the counter. He was scowling at me, still over the top of his glasses.

"More than seventy-two hours. That's form 47-B," he said.

His scorn told me I should have known. We had to go through the whole miserable business again. I wanted to run. I've never been a rule breaker. I never even drew lines under words in my school books. What would they do to me when they found out?

"Check back with us in a week," he said.

He did not leap over the counter and arrest me when I turned to leave. I'd had two narrow escapes in one day. After that, even my dull nine to five looked pretty good.

§ § §



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old woman moaned. "How could they do it? How could they do it to my Simon? They saw him every day. He used to give them lollypops when their mothers sent them for a loaf of bread. How could they *do* that to someone they knew?"

The nurse in the white starch had no answer for her.

For the rest of that week I expected a knock at the door, word from my roommates that some FBI-types had been looking for me, or at least a letter in the mail. But there was nothing. Maybe the FBMP was as far behind in its work as other government bureaus.

I started taking a different route to and from work, afraid the little man would see me and have me arrested. I thought of having my head examined but I was afraid of what might be in there.

Wouldn't it be a nice birthday present for Mama if I found that other Stephanie for her?

I had to stop thinking things like that, even as a joke.

Several weeks later Mama called. I almost dropped the phone when I heard her voice. It was too soon for her to come to the city and take me to lunch again.

"Stephanie, you'll never guess who I ran into at the country club today."

"No, Mama. Who?"

"Bradley Thompson!"

"That's nice, Mama. Who is Bradley Thompson?"

"Steff, don't tease. You remember Bradley Thompson. Captain of the football team. Senior class president. You dated him in junior high." She waited expectantly.

In junior high I'd thought boys were visitors from another planet. Had I ever dated one? "Oh, you mean Brad! What's he doing these days?"

As she talked I thought about changelings again. But she *was* my mother, wasn't she? I remembered her—didn't I? Wasn't she the woman who used to set a place at the table for my imaginary friend? Wasn't she the one who stayed up half the night once, making a sword for me out of cardboard and foil?

"—get together for dinner and later the two of you could—"

"Um-hum," I said, thinking about changelings.

"Then you'll do it? Oh, Steff—"

Wait a minute. Backspace.

"Mama, I'm sorry. I was talking to someone else. What was it you wanted?"

Only to get me safely married to a nice young man and settled in



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the old neighborhood where she could keep an eye on me. It was worse for her because I'd given the wrong impression the first time around. She's very good at crying on the telephone without making a sound. One more cross for her to bear, nailed together with my own two hands.

I can't explain why I did it. Maybe I wanted to punish myself for the crimes I'd committed against my mother. I forgot to take my new route to work. I wasn't even aware of it until I saw the leters on the door.

But they were the wrong letters.

Federal Bureau of Urban Ecology.

I didn't go inside. I was afraid of what I might say to the people inside. All the wrong things probably. I was angry—the way a child is angry. I wanted to throw myself on the floor and have a screaming tantrum. The FBMP had been a chance to straighten out the whole mess with my mother. I'd risked arrest in filing that report. Now it was gone and I felt cheated.

I was ashamed and more than a little scared. They had only moved the office— All I had to do was go in there and ask— If I really thought—

But I wasn't thinking. Finding that office just minutes after having lunch with Mama had been an omen. Omens are supposed to work out better than that. A flight of crows or the entrails of a chicken shouldn't pack up their filing cabinets and steal away in the middle of the night.

I had wandered down the street in a daze. I had to stop this. I had to get a grip on myself. If I thought the FBMP was the answer to my problem—instead of a shrink—then the thing to do was to march back to that other bureau and ask where the new office of the missing persons bureau was.

I didn't want to sort that out. I didn't want to know if I really believed they could find Stephanie Tobin for me. I tried to move without thinking at all.

I must have read it wrong before. Maybe the light was bad.

Federal Bureau of Missing Persons.

The little man with bifocals was alone in the office. He looked up grumpily when I came in. "Can I help you?" he asked, sounding as if he hoped he wouldn't have to.

"I filed a report a couple weeks ago."

"Name?"

"Stephanie Tobin."

"Oh, yes, the cousins with the same name," he grumbled disap-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

provingly. He opened a desk drawer and shuffled through some papers. "I don't know why you couldn't find her," he said, coming over to the counter.

I guess I forgot to look in the mirror, I almost told him. I was punchy again. I wanted to giggle. What was wrong with me? All he could tell me—

"Her mother could have told you where she is," he went on. "It says here that after graduation from high school she spent two months in Europe. When she returned she entered Vassar as a freshman." He looked at me over the tops of his glasses. "You *do* know where Vassar is?"

I nodded. Where else would Mama's daughter go to school?

"Last winter she became engaged to a young man by the name of Bradley Thompson. Recently she was maid of honor at the wedding of Miss Anne Marie Shoemaker. Miss Tobin was very surprised when our agent contacted her. She doesn't remember *having* a cousin named Stephanie."

He was waiting for me to say something. How could I? You can't talk if you don't exist.

"He was a good boy," the mother repeated, disbelieving. "He worked after school, helped around the house. He was always polite. He rescued a kitten from a tree just last week. Everyone in the neighborhood loved him. *Ask* them! A good boy—"

The cop thought of the twenty-three bodies awaiting identification, the people in the hospital, still fighting for their lives. A good boy. They always said that, or something like it. They couldn't accept the fact of their own guilt, that there must have been signs. A *good* boy!

I think I walked out of there. I can't remember if the little man tried to stop me. I never made it to work. I remember wandering up and down streets, staring hard at the store fronts and wondering if the same ones would still be there if I turned to look behind me. I was afraid to check it out.

Alternate universes. Maybe I was more right then I knew when I thought of the city as many worlds all crushed together. Maybe it really happens here. Maybe—things leak. I could have walked through a door some time and left behind my own world and Mama and the old man and English compositions taped to the refrigerator door.

Alternate universes. It has such a nice ring to it. Very suitable


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for today when everyone "knows" the universe is like a clock, with rules printed in gold for successful operation.

Is it any easier to believe in alternate universes than in fairies? Mathematical formulas instead of incantations? Lasers instead of magic swords? Electricity instead of fairy lamps?

Give me the latitude and longitude for Elf Land.

Show me the way to go home.

Telephone. Alexander Graham Bell, one of the greatest warlocks of his time. Millions of magic spells in a little circle with holes in it.

"Hello, Mama. Happy birthday. Yes, I know it's a little early but I've been planning a surprise for you and I just couldn't wait any longer."

When you care enough— Didn't she deserve it? Hadn't she bandaged my scraped knees, made that sword, taped my English compositions to the refrigerator? Well, *hadn't* she? Tell me, please!

I wanted to be there with her when she went to Vassar and met her daughter Stephanie. I wanted to hear the two of them talking about Bradley and wedding plans and Anne Marie Shoemaker. I wanted to see Mama smile without hurting. But that would have spoiled the magic.

Only don't call it that. Call it an alternate universe.

Besides, I had something else to do. If I came through that door once then I should be able to go the other way. All I had to do was get directions.

I did go back there. Several times. Sometimes the office is the Federal Bureau of Urban Ecology. Sometimes it is the Oriental Linoleum Company. Sometimes the little man with bifocals works there and sometimes it's the bleached blonde. But they don't recognize me and they don't know what I'm talking about when I ask for the Federal Bureau of Missing Persons.

Sometimes things leak through from another side. But can't they leak back again?

There is an ad in the newspaper today. Now I know where they all come from, those funny little items that hint of heartbreak.

"Mama, do you remember the toy soldiers and the old man who gave them to me? Call at once! Steff."

It might work. Only don't call it magic.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# DOO-DAH CHEMISTRY
## by William Tuning

*The redoubtable William Tuning, bon vivant, raconteur, and all-around friendly bear, has been reading science fiction for several decades and writing it for part of this decade. He lives in California with two cats, Stillwell and John J. Pershing, and is single. "I've only been married once," he says, "but I've been divorced a hundred times." His SF novel,* Tornado Alley, *has just been published by Ace Books.*

Several years ago there was a great deal of talk about what was thought to be a new molecular form of water—a long-chain molecule of $H_2O$ which had silicates present in it and, it was theorized, formed directly from gases and solid components in crevices of quartz rocks.

This material was called polywater, and it excited a great deal of scientific inquiry at the time. The interest in polywater was, of course, involved with what was thought to be the peculiar nature of its formation and some odd properties which it seemed to possess.

Needless to say, a number of research laboratories were conducting quite a bunch of experiments—hoping for some kind of polywater breakthrough.

It was during this period that I had occasion to visit a chemist friend who was in charge of some of these polywater experiments in his laboratory. He went on at some length to enthusiastically explain all the benchwork in progress under his supervision.

Since I have no knowledge of science, I was not greatly interested in the conversation and I soon grew bored. As a polite means of getting shut of all this talk about polywater, I suggested that we might adjourn to a local water-hole for some lunch.

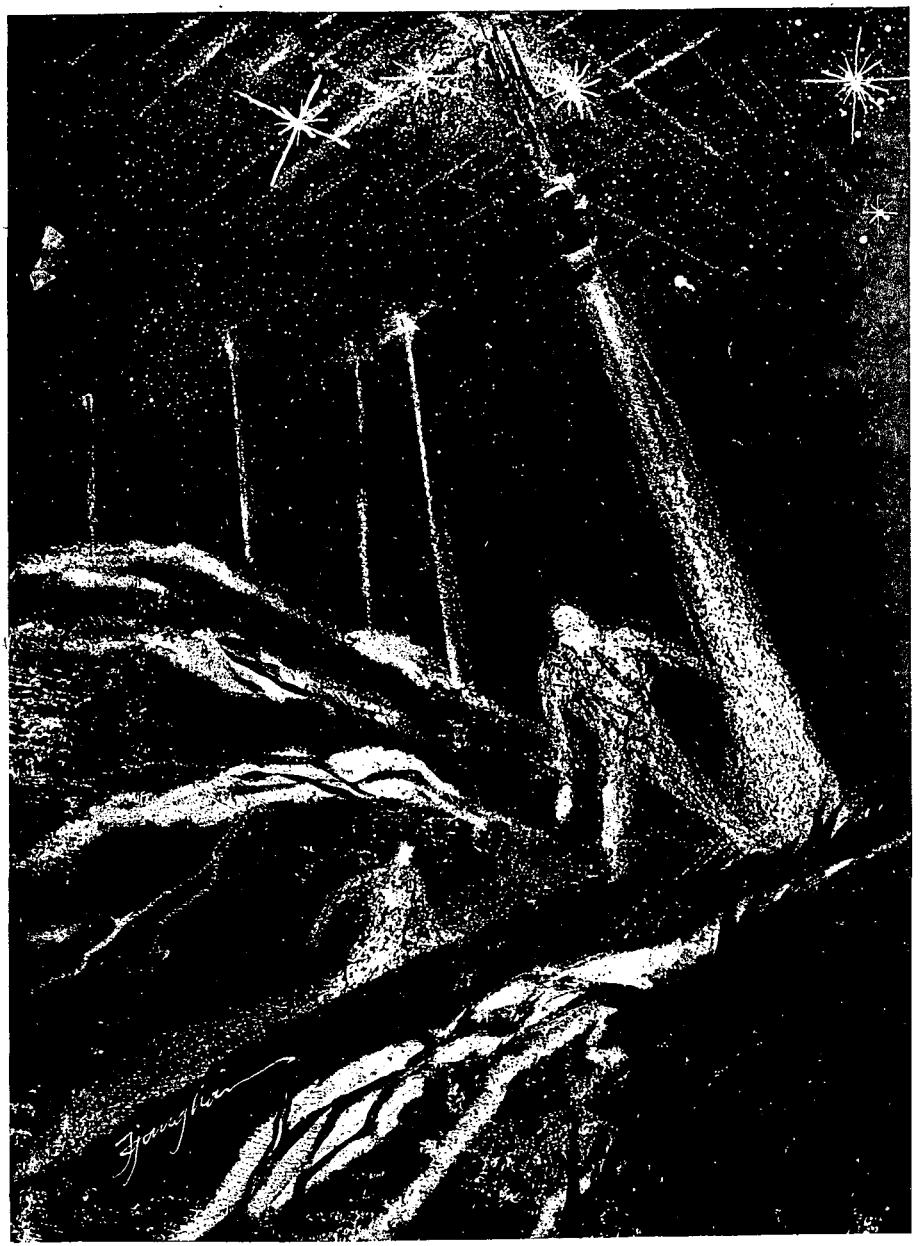
My friend expressed his regrets, explaining that he could not leave the lab unattended, since he had to monitor all these tomfool experiments that were in progress.

"So you can't go to lunch," I said.

"That's right," he replied. "I'm on polywater duty all the day."

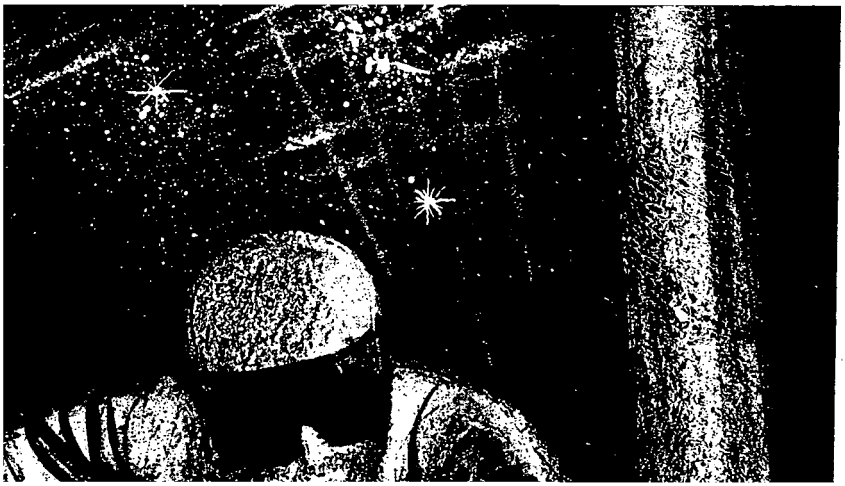


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*The author's recent memoir,* The Way the Future Was *(Del Rey Books, 1978), tells far more about Frederik Pohl than we can possibly find space for in this brief introduction. Here, we can only say he's done just about everything in the SF field—fan, amateur publisher, agent, author, magazine editor, book editor, and lecturer. Herewith, a sequel to "Mars Masked," which appeared in these pages recently.*

I.

Every priest has someone to confess to, a rabbi has another rabbi, even a Protestant minister has some ecclesiastical superior. H. Hornswell Hake had no one like that. He was a Unitarian, alone as any ship's captain in command. The idea of laying his problems on Beacon Street would have struck him as ludicrous if it had entered his mind at all. And so, without a wife or steady lover, without parents, not actively in psychoanalytic therapy and even (he realized with some concern) lacking in really close friends, he had nobody to talk to.

And he wanted to talk; God, how he wanted to talk! It is not an easy thing for a man to discover that he has infected half a continent. It clawed at his mind. Hake's life agenda was not clear to him, but parts of it were certain. Most certain of all was that his goal was not to make people sick but to make them well. Jogging, stretch-and-bending, working out with the weights, he kept thinking about Germans and Danes red-eyed and sneezing. Flat on his back, he saw himself as a Typhoid Mary on a continental scale. He was flat on his back a lot, too. The disease Hake had spread through Western Europe was what the Agency called a Three-X strain, which meant only that it had so high a relapsing rate that the average sufferer could count on three recurrences of fever, trots, and miseries. Hake received the best of medical care and managed five. It was well over a month before he was ready for duty again.

Not that he was either idle or alone. When he was relapsed Alys Brand, Jessie Tunman, and half a dozen others rallied round with soup and solicitude; when he was up and about, Jessie was there with concerns about the Carpet Caper and the next budget


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meeting, his LRY director with plans for the Midsummer Magic Show benefit and worries about which teenagers were into what drugs, Alys Brant with her own inevitable self. Alys had had only the lightest touch of the sickness, but it was enough to give her strong sympathy with Hake's reiterated bouts, and that was more sympathy than Hake felt able to deal with. He kept her at bay by sending her off on library-research jobs for him, and by the time he was well enough to get back to church for a Sunday morning sermon he had decided what he wanted to do. Like many a minister before him, he was going to work out his problems on the congregation. He might not have tried it during the regular church year. But summer services were informal and usually limited to a couple dozen of the most devoted members.

The weather had turned hot. Hake walked slowly over to the church before the service, pacing himself to keep from working up a sweat or increasing his respiration—he did not want to breathe in any more of the smoggy air than he had to, and in this kind of weather he either ran at daybreak, when it was still cool, or gave up running entirely. He unlocked the church door and propped it wide.

It was an old church and a small one, but it was Hake's own. His heart lightened as he went inside, studying the worn carpet, neatening the racks of name badges waiting for the congregation. The paint was chipping on the ceiling again. Hake frowned. The Agency had been spendthrift in providing luxuries for his own use—the wind generator, new office furniture, beautifully functioning fittings in the bathroom, even a redone kitchen though bachelor Hake almost never cooked a meal. It was time they put a little of that money into the church. Enough for a paint job, anyway, and perhaps new floor coverings so that they could give up the fund-raising Carpet Capers. Next time he talked to Curmudgeon—but when would that be? And maybe—maybe, after this morning's sermon, there would be no handouts from Curmudgeon ever again. That would be a pity, perhaps. But it would be better than living with guilt.

"As most of you know," he began, "I spent several weeks in Europe last month, and it has made me think about the world. Some of what I'm thinking I don't like. I look at the world, and I see a crazy kind of race where the way to win isn't to run faster than the other guy but to trip him up. It isn't war. But it isn't peace, either, and it is degrading the quality of life for everybody,


LICENSED TO WZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for ourselves as well as the rest of the world." There were only about thirty-five people in the church, cross-legged on the floor, slouched on beanbag pillows or sitting properly erect at the benches along the sides of the room. They were all listening attentively—or, if not attentively, with that polite expression of passive acceptance that he had seen most Sunday mornings of his life from this pulpit. "Some of it is economic," he said, "so that we play games with each other's currencies, raiding the pound and speculating in the mark; dumping gold on the market when the dollar softens, and buying it up to hoard when the Russians or the South Africans or the Indians start to sell. Some of it is mercantile. We sell wheat for less than it costs to raise, to countries that ship us TV sets for less than they cost to make. And some of it"—he hesitated, looking at the words he had written down, looking for the courage to go beyond them—"some of it is psychological. We censure the Spaniards for not giving freedom to the Basques, and we snub the rest of the world for interfering with our own dealings with the Navajos."

The eyes were glazing now, as he had known they would be, but doggedly he went on reciting statistics and explaining policies. Even Ted Brant, lying back against the beanbag, knees up, one arm possessively around Alys's shoulder, the other hand resting on Sue-Ellen's knee, was no longer looking hostile, only bored, while Alys was nodding at every point. It wasn't agreement, really. She was just acknowledging the use Hake was making of the information she had supplied him. Hake went on with his catalogue: aid to defectors, support to dissidents, jamming of broadcasts, dumping of pollution—"those thousand-meter stacks get rid of our own pollution," he said, "but only by throwing it up high enough so that it comes down on London and Copenhagen." Allen Haversford was no longer glassy-eyed. The director of International Pets and Flowers was listening with full, if noncommittal, attention, and so, surprisingly, was Jessie Tunman.

Hake rounded into his moral. "What I have come to believe," he said, "is that it is not enough not to be at war. We need more. We need tolerance and caring. We need to give credit to those who disagree with us for being perhaps wrong, but not villains. We need to accept diversity and encourage individuality. We need to abandon suspicion as a way of life, and turn away from either preemption or revenge. And we need to find within ourselves the solutions to the problems we make, instead of trying to make our own condition relatively better by making someone else's rela-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tively worse. And now," he said, "Ellie Fratkin and Bill Meecham will entertain us with one of their lovely cello and piano duets."

To the strains of Schubert—or maybe it was Kabalevsky, he had misplaced his notes and when Bill and Ellie played all the selections sounded about the same—he sat on the platform and looked out over his congregation. To the extent that Hake had family, they were it. He knew them from the inside out—inside best, as he knew his adopted Uncle Phil not as the steely-eyed IRS examiner but as the hiccoughing and amiable drunk who showed up at one of Hake's childhood hospital stays with a wetting, weeping baby doll as a get-well present, having forgotten what sex his sister's stepchild happened to be. Bland Teddy Cantrell, squatting like a Buddha and nodding to the music, would always be the tearful suicide-attempter who had set fire to Hake's study with a starters' pistol when his wife left him. One of the times his wife left him. The two gay Tonys, the stablest and most dignified couple in the church as they leaned shoulder-to-shoulder against the wall, had blubbered their hearts out for him while deciding to come out of the closet. How many of them had he reached with what he had had to say? And as the coffee came out and the parishioners drifted around, he listened to the comments. "Really elevating," said the tall Tony, and the plumper, younger one said, "You always make me feel good, Horny." Jessie Tunman: "I only wish you were that openminded about other things, Horny." Elinor Fratkin, hissing into his ear the moment she caught him alone: "I'm simply *ashamed*, Horny! How can I face William when you didn't say that what we were playing was his own transcription of the Bach partitia?" Alys Brant, lingering next to him while Ted clutched her hand and stared resolutely away, "I loved the way you put it all together. When are we going to New York to finish the research?" Teddy Cantrell: "You've given us a lot to think about." And just behind him, Allen Haversford, eyes hooded, stiffly shaking Hake's hand, "You certainly have, and I want to talk to you about it at some length, Reverend Hake, but not just now."

Did that sound like a threat? At least a warning? For better or worse, it was about the only sign he had that anyone had really listened to him. He went back to his home, spent the day fiddling with filing sermons and putting together reports for the Monday board meeting, watched television for a while and decided to go to bed early; and when he flushed his toilet that night it spoke to him in Curmudgeon's voice.



LICENSED TO UN2.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The essence of comedy is the incongruous thwarting of expectations. Hake saw his life as taking a comic turn. Kidnaped by a girl who had tried to lure him into a toilet. Funny! The real guns didn't make it less funny, they only turned the humor black. Sneezing western Europe into an economic tremor, what could be funnier than that? And now being given cloak-and-dagger orders by another toilet, that was hilarious—after it had stopped being startling, anyway.

When you looked at the appliance itself there was nothing particularly funny about it. Squat, solid, and almost majestic in heather-blue ceramic, it looked like a superbly engineered device for exporting a person's excretory by-products as decently and as rapidly away from the person himself as anyone could wish. And nothing more. And in fact it was all of that, but something more. The bottom of the flush tank was four inches thick. Whatever was inside was concealed by the seamlessly molded ceramic, but from a palm-sized metal grille underneath the tank the voice came. The flushing lever was resilient black plastic, attractively scored with a moire surface. It did not look as though it could recognize Hake's thumbprint. But it could. Hake experimented in fascination. Flush with his finger, flush with his fist, nothing happened. (Except that the water in the bowl quietly scoured and drained itself away.) Flush with his thumb, as the design invited one to do, and he had established contact with Curmudgeon himself.

It was only his own thumb that would do it. He proved that with accommodating (but faintly uneasy) Jessie Tunman the next morning, when he lured her into the new bathroom on a ruse—"Flush that for me, will you? I want to see if I can hear it out here."

And she did, grinning skeptically and a little nervously, and he couldn't—neither the sound of the water nor Curmudgeon's recorded voice. Only Jessie herself. "We've sure come up in the world, Horny. And now"—fleeing—"I'd better get back to the correspondence."

It was not quite true, Hake saw, that his life was turning funny, because funny was what it had been for some time. He would not have lasted through those flabby decades in a wheelchair if he hadn't seen the humor of it. Raunchy young male lovingly tended by the sweet-limbed girls the jocks envied him; football coach who could not totter the length of the field alone, religious leader who had never for one moment considered the possibility of the existence of a supernatural god—or any other kind,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

either. Spiritual counselor who eased three hundred parishioners' sins and temptations, that he had never had the chance to experience himself. Oh, yes! Funny. Funny as that thing must be at which you must laugh, so that you won't cry. Exactly as funny as, and funny in exactly the same way as, what was happening in his life now. Being talked to by a toilet was ludicrous, but so was most of the life story of Horny Hake.

What his toilet had said to him was: "Horny! If you are not alone, flush the toilet again at once!"

There was a short pause, presumably while the toilet satisfied itself it was not immediately to be reflushed, and then Curmudgeon's voice said more amiably, "After all, old boy, you could have been into some peculiar customs we didn't know about. If you are, practice them in some other john. In this one, when you press the lever down you will get any messages from me that have accumulated. Do it at least three times a day—when you get up, around mid-afternoon, just before you go to sleep. If there aren't any messages, or when the messages are over, you'll hear a four-forty A beep. That means you can reply, or leave a message for me if you have one."

There was a pause, but as Hake did not hear a 440-hertz tone he assumed that Curmudgeon was marshalling his thoughts. When the toilet spoke again it was crisp and clear:

"So here are your instructions, Hake. First, keep on building up your strength. Second, report to IPF tomorrow afternoon for a physical—just go over, they'll know what to do. Third, flush three times a day. Whether you need to or not. And, oh, yes, that sermon was a smart move, but don't overdo it. It's all right for your congregation to think you're a woolly-headed liberal, but don't go so far you talk yourself into it. We're pretty pleased with you right now, Hake. There's a nice little report in your promotion package. Don't spoil it."

The toilet beeped, and then returned to being only a toilet again.

Riding over to Eatontown the next day, Hake investigated the inside of his mind and found only a vacuum where his moral sense should be. Curmudgeon was *so* sure that his orders would be obeyed and his cause was just. Was it possible that it was? But surely it couldn't be right to make people sick who had done one no harm! But surely a man like Curmudgeon could not be so self-assured and still be as wholly wrong as he appeared. But


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surely—there were too many sureties, and Hake didn't really feel any of them. How was it possible that everybody in the world seemed absolutely sure they were in the right, when they all disagreed with each other, and when Hake felt nothing of the sort? Maybe the thing was to go with self-interest? Hake's self-interest seemed to lie with Curmudgeon, exempter from laws, provider of new bathrooms, balancer of the budget. If he stayed with Curmudgeon, he had no doubt, he would find some pretty nice fringe benefits. He might not have to ride around in this sort of smelly, choking charcoal-burning cab when he went out. Electrocar, inertial-drive, even a gasoline Buick like the person who had first summoned him to this exercise, they were all within his reach.

At IPF he didn't see Allen Haversford, only a pretty young nurse who took his vital signs, turned her back while he undressed into a cotton smock, X-rayed him through and through, slipped him three painless spray-injections (For what? What plague would he be spreading now, and where?), pronounced him fit with her eyes as well as the signed report she Xeroxed for him to keep and turned him loose. After he shook her hand and was already on his way to the gate, Hake came to a sudden realization. Old Horny was horny! And he had been given an invitation, and had let it slide.

With so many of the women he encountered a protected species, not to be touched, and with so much of his adult life spent under circumstances in which sex was only an abstraction, Hake knew he was pitifully unworldly. No other man in New Jersey would have left that office without trying it on, especially with the kind of encouragement he had no doubt he had observed. This needed to be thought out. He dropped the afternoon's meeting with the school administration from his thoughts, crossed Highway 35 and ordered himself a beer in the lounge of an air-conditioned motel.

It was all part and parcel of the same thing, he told himself. Who the hell did he think he was, some kind of saint? Why shouldn't he have a few vices? Why was he running away from Alys Brant, and why shouldn't he let Curmudgeon make his life easier? He had another beer, and then another. Because he was in the best of health, three beers didn't make him drunk; but they did make him lose sense of time. When he made up his mind that he would go back and see if that clean-featured young nurse was as interested as he thought he discovered that it was past seven, the gates were closed; he had not only missed the meeting with the school but he would not even have time to get back home for his


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afternoon flush before getting over to the Midsummer Magic Show. Too bad, thought Horny, striding out into the highway and commandeering a cab, but tomorrow was another day, and she'd still be there then!

The Midsummer Magic Show was the church's big fund-raiser. It took place in an old movie theater at a traffic circle near Long Branch. In high-energy days the theater had sucked audiences away from the downtown houses, kids with their dates, young marrieds with their kids, senior citizens destroying one more day. Now the flow was seeping back to the cities, and the highway audiences had drained away. The theater kept going with classic movie revivals at a dollar a head, and now and then a concert. Nothing else would draw enough to pay the costs of keeping the theater alive. Mostly those didn't, either, so that the manager was thrilled to rent it for one night each year to the Unitarian church. Hake got there just as the magician, The Incredible Art, was setting up his effects.

Alys Brant saw Hake coming down the aisle and waved the fingers of one hand. That was all she could wave; she was strapped into one of Art's illusions, rehearsing to be The Woman Sawed in Half, and her hands were crossed tightly on her breast to stay as far as possible away from the screeching, spinning buzz-saw that seemed to be slicing through her belly. When The Incredible Art saw who she was greeting he stopped the saw, levered it up and away from her and began to extract her. "Hi, Horny," he called. "Help me get this thing back of the curtain."

Art was built to be a magician, or to look like one: six feet three and weighing a fast hundred and forty-five pounds, narrow face, piercing eyes. He wore his blond hair in General Custer flowing waves, beard and mustache the same; he looked like a skinny Scandinavian devil, and had cultivated a voice an octave below Mephistopheles. Wraith-thin, he was astonishingly strong. The prop weighed as much as a piano, and although it was on rollers Hake was puffing by the time they had it out of sight, while The Incredible Art was incredibly not even sweating. "Hate to have to do that by myself, Horny," he observed, wrapping his long arms around one end of it and tugging it a few more inches out of the way. "Guess I'm ready for 'em now."

Alys returned, slinky in diaphanous harem top and pants. "That saw always makes me have to pee," she confided. She was braless under the filmy bolero, Hake saw—and, he was pretty



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sure, pantyless below, too, although the way the gauze draped around her it was hard to be sure. He found it both exciting and uncomfortable. His glands had not yet resigned themselves to missing out on the nurse, and when Alys began admiringly to trace his pectorals with one hand and his latissimus dorsi with the other they stirred with new hope. The woman's signals were maddeningly contradictory! Hake formed phrases in his mind, like, If you're so horny for Horny, honey, where were you in Europe? But fairly he admitted to himself that his signals to her had to be equally contrary and obscure, because his drives and prohibitions baffled them. He escaped when the theater began to fill, helped by the fact that among the earliest arrivals were the other three from Alys's family, Ted Brant looking annoyed, Walter Sturgis worried, Sue-Ellen reproachful. Hake took a seat as far from them at the opposite end of the first row as he could manage. It would have been better to sit naturally and suspicion-allayingly next to them. But he didn't feel up to it.

The Incredible Art's performance included all the standards Hake remembered from every other magic show he had ever seen, from vanishing billiard balls to producing live pigeons from Alys's bodice, after he had finished sawing her in half. The audience was half children—and the other half grownups volunteering to be childish again for one night—and they ate it all up. As they always had. Six thousand dollars in admissions had funneled into the church treasury, the people were having a ball, and Hake allowed himself to feel good.

And therefore unwary; and when The Incredible Art began calling volunteers up from the audience for his last and greatest feat, Hake allowed himself to be swept with the flow.

"And now," the magician boomed compellingly, "for a final demonstration of The Incredible Art of The Incredible Art, I am going to try an experiment in hypnotism. I have here thirty volunteers, selected at random. I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, to tell the audience: Have any of you been rehearsed, coached or instructed in any way as to what you are supposed to do up here?"

All thirty heads waggled "no", Hake's among them.

"Then I want all of you to let your heads hang forward, chins on your chests. Close your eyes. You are growing sleepy. Your eyes are closed, and you feel sleepy. I am going to count backwards from five, and when I say zero you will be asleep: Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Zero."

Hake was not sure he felt sleepy, but he did seem to be com-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fortable enough as he was. He heard sounds of movement on the stage, and peered through a slitted eye to observe Art quietly shepherding half a dozen of the volunteers back into the audience; evidently they had looked up and shown they were awake. "Now the rest of you," Art rumbled. "Keep your eyes closed, but raise your heads. Do not open your eyes until I say 'open'. At that time you will be fully aware of what is going on, but you will not remember any of it after you leave this stage. Now, open!"

If this was what hypnosis felt like, Hake thought, it was not all that different from the rest of life. He didn't feel changed, but he found himself compliantly raising an arm, then squatting on the floor, then performing a little dance. It was as easy to do it as to break the pattern of obedience, so why not do it? Only when Art began pairing off the surviving subjects, male and female, into waltzing couples did Hake falter. That he perceived as somehow threatening; he broke stride, and Art waved him off the stage. Of the original thirty, only six people stayed there through the end. Somehow, Hake was not surprised that one of them was Alys.

At the party afterward, The Incredible Art was riffling cards in a series of buck-eye shuffles for some of the kids. Hake, drink in hand, drifted over to him. "I was never hypnotized before," he offered, still trying to analyze his feelings about it.

"You weren't then either," said Art, tapping the deck and popping all four aces into the hands of a ten-year-old girl.

"I wasn't? But—but I found myself doing things without any real control."

"Did you?" Art fanned the deck, displaying 52 cards neatly ordered into suits and denominations, and then put it away. "I don't know what you did do," he admitted. "I've done that show a hundred times. If I get enough people up, a couple of them will do everything I tell them to. The rest I lose."

From behind Hake, Jessie Tunman said triumphantly, "Then it's just a trick!"

"If you say so, Jessie." The Incredible Art grinned like a tiger behind the blond mask of hair. "But I think what you mean is when *I* do it it's a trick, when somebody else does it it's science, right?"

"The phenomenon of hypnotism is well established in psychological literature," she said stiffly. "There's a point at which being a skeptic betrays simply an unwillingness to accept the evidence, Mr. Art."

"Now you're talking about flying saucers," he said. They had


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had this argument before. "You're going to tell me that with all the recorded sightings only a prejudiced bigot would say they don't exist, right?"

"No. I wasn't going to tell you anything, Mr. Art. It's no concern of mine what you believe in or don't believe in. But there are things your much vaunted rationalism just can't explain. UFOlogy went through all this in the Sixties. One guy said the UFOs were weather balloons, another said meteorites. People said any crazy thing that came into their heads, rather than accept the reality of visitors from some other place in the universe—dust devils, the planet Venus, even swamp gas! And nobody could face up to the simple facts."

"What are the facts, Jessie dear?" Art inquired softly.

She scowled. "You exasperate me!"

"No, really. I want to know."

She said, "I don't think you do. But it's simple. It's the law according to Sherlock Holmes. 'After you eliminate the impossible, the explanation that is left, however improbable, must be right.' You may choose to believe that fifty thousand responsible observers are all crazy or liars. To me, that is impossible."

Hake put down his glass. "Nice talking to you," he said, and made his escape. He didn't want to be in that argument, and the party showed signs of breaking up anyway. A family who lived in Elberon offered him a lift back to the rectory, and he squeezed into the back seat of their inertial two-door, with a sleeping three-year-old in his lap and the whining flywheel tickling the soles of his feet through the floorboards underneath, and when he entered his bedroom he heard a sound from the bath. The toilet was making a little whining sound as it leaked water.

Guessing correctly that it was demanding attention, he flushed it at once. An instant voice barked, "Stay right there, Hake!" A moment passed, then the same voice, Curmudgeon's voice, with a tiny difference in quality that made him realize it was not a recording but the man himself direct, snarled, "What the hell, Hake! You didn't report in for your afternoon message."

"I'm sorry, Curmudgeon. I got busy."

"You don't ever get that busy, Hake! Remember that. Now, I want you in New York tomorrow, 2:00 PM, in the flesh."

"But—I've got appointments—"

"Not any more, you don't. Call them off. Take down this address and *be* there." Curmudgeon spelled out the name of what sounded like a theatrical casting agency in the West 40s and signed off.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thoughtfully, Hake used the toilet for its alternative purpose, and then shrugged. As with The Incredible Art, it seemed as easy to obey the command as to rebel against it. He put on his pajamas and a robe and walked out into the office to get Alys's phone number.

To his surprise, the light was on. Jessie Tunman was there, writing rapidly in her shorthand notebook. "Oh, hello, Horny. I didn't mean to disturb you."

"You didn't. That's all right." He looked up the Brant-Sturgis number and touched the number-buttons. It was answered at once, and by Alys. "Hello, Alys. Horny Hake here. I just realized that I have tomorrow free. I know it's short notice, but would you like to do that library bit with me? You would? That's great, Alys. All right, I'll be ready at nine, and thanks." He hung up, pleased with his cleverness; using Alys as a front, no one would think that he was going to the city for some hidden reason; at most, they would think his hidden reason not hidden at all. He said benevolently to Jessie, "Working late, are you?"

"I just wanted to remind myself of some things I have to do tomorrow, Horny. And, to tell the truth, since we've got the air-conditioning and all—well, I like to be here. It's pretty hot in my room." Jessie lived in what had once been a beach motel, now more or less remodeled into one-room apartments. Its one significant advantage was that it was cheap. "Horny? I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but are you going to the library in New York tomorrow?"

"Yes. I've been promising myself that I would for a couple of months, and I just decided to do it."

"Can I go along? There's—" She hesitated. "I know you don't believe in it, Horny, but there's some new material on UFOs out, and I'd like to look into it. I won't be in your way."

Hake said, "Well, I'd certainly be glad to have you, Jessie, but it's not my car."

"Oh, I'm sure Alys won't mind. Matter of fact," she said archly, "I bet she'll be glad for a chaperone, you know, so Ted and Walter won't be worried. That's wonderful, Horny! I'm going home right this minute, so I can get in early and take care of everything before we go."

As it turned out, Alys didn't mind at all, or said she didn't, and all the way into New York Jessie Tunman primly rode the mother-in-law seat in the back of the little charcoal-generator. It



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a two-hour ride, the three-wheeler barely crawling as it climbed the long bridge ascents and the occasional hills; but on the level it chugged along at the double-nickels, and downhill it took off. As they whined down the ramp into the Lincoln Tunnel, Alys slipping between the sectional buses and the fat tractor-trailer trucks that were inching along, Hake was glad they were almost there, prayerful that their luck would hold out a few minutes more.

It had been smuggy-hot all the way in, and the tunnel itself was a gas chamber. "Roll up your windows," Alys gagged. It didn't help. By the time they broke into open air, even the open air of midtown Manhattan, Hake's head was pounding and Alys's driving had become even more capricious. They drove down to the Village, parked the three-wheeler in the three-deck parking garage that surrounded the arch in Washington Square and walked over to the library. It was bloody *hot*.

A drama was being enacted in New York City that day; dressing before his TV news program, Hake had seen shots of a tank-trucker from Great Kills, perched over the discharge hose of his gasoline truck with a lighted Davy lamp in his hand, holding Rockefeller Center hostage in the cause of returning Staten Island to the state of New Jersey. Ringed by police sharpshooters who dared not fire, giddy in the fumes of the gas that vented up past the wire-screen around his candle, the man had been haranguing twenty terrified people, and the millions beyond who listened safely through the networks' parabolic microphones. Breathing shallowly of the hot, carbonized air, feeling the asphalt suck at his shoes, stepping around dog-turds and less identifiable gobbets of filth, Hake understood how the man had gone mad, how a thousand city-dwellers a year raped, crucified, leaped from windows, or set fire to themselves; it was an environment to madden anyone, especially in weather like this.

And when they walked in through the double revolving doors of the library, it was into dry, sweet spring. A room five stories high, and air-conditioned to perfection! "Power-pigs," snarled Hake, but Alys laid her hand on his arm.

"It isn't just for people, Horny, dear, it's all computers here. They'd break down if they didn't keep the air just right. Come on, we sign in here, and then they'll give us a terminal."

The library gave them more than that. They gave them a room to themselves, glass-walled on three sides, looking out into the five-floor atrium on the fourth, with comfortable chairs, a desk,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ash-trays, a thermos flask of ice-water . . . and the one thing that made it all real: a computer terminal. Alys escorted Jessie Tunman to her own cubicle, a few doors down the corridor, then came back and closed the door. "Now I've got you, Horny," she said, touching her palm to his cheek. And passed by him, and sat down before the terminal. Expertly she punched in her signature number, taken from the card issued at the desk, and a series of codes. "I've ordered a citation index search for starters, Horny, keyed to any three of six or more subject phrases. You'll have to tell me what the phrases are. Did you know you're a very sexy man, Horny?"

Starting to ask what she meant by the first part of what she had said, Hake jumped the tracks as he tried to switch to the second. "Alys," he said, "please remember that I'm your marriage counselor, as well as, I hope, your friend."

"Oh, I do, Horny, I do. Now, the kind of phrases we give the computer are whatever subjects interest you. For instance," she tapped the keys, "some of the things you were talking about in your sermon, like so." The screen on the terminal typed out the words:

1. Major strikes.
2. Exotic plant and animal pests.
3. Currency manipulations.

"Got it?" she asked. "What else?"

"I could answer that better if I knew what you were doing."

"Sorry, Horny, I thought I told you. Once we give it six or eight subjects, the computer selects some basic sources in each of them—say, a newspaper story about the bus strike in London, or the police in New York, and one on those water-lilies you were talking about, and so on. Then it starts searching for works that cite sources from any three of those subjects. If you find somebody's written a book that includes material on three of the things you're interested in, then the chances are pretty good you'll be interested in the book, right? Funny thing. When we were in Europe, the way you were being Big Daddy to those kids, it turned me right off. Did you know that?"

Half laughing, and half of the laughing out of embarrassment, Hake said, "Let's stick to one thing at a time, okay? I'm also interested in fads that keep people from working. How do you say that?" He was thinking of the hula-hoops, of course; and when they found a generic term for that, and for terrorism, and for filthy cities, and for dumping commodities and despoiling natural


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

resources and two or three other things, Alys punched an "execute" code and they watched the screen generate titles, quick as a zipper, laying them line by line across the tube:

*AAF Studies World Events,* monograph, U.S. Govt. Prntg. Offc.

*AAAS Symposium on Social Change,* Am. Acdy. Adv. Sci. proceedings.

*Aar und das schrecklichkeit von Erde, Der,* 8Bde, von E.T. Gründemeister, München.

*Aback and Abeam, A Memoir,* by C. Franklin Monscutter, N.Y.

*Abandonment of Reason,* by William Reichsleder, N Y Times Sun. Mag., XCIV, 22, 83-88.

*Abasing the Environment—*

"No good," said Alys, leaning forward and hitting the switch that stopped the quick-time march of titles up the screen. "At that right we'll be here till winter and still in the As. I like *manly* men, Horny, that's why I sometimes get just smothered with Walter and Ted, they're so *kind.*"

"Alys, damn it!"

"Well, I just want you to know. So here's what we'll do. First, I'll kill all the foreign-language entries; should have thought of that in the first place. Then I'll set it to look for citations in five categories instead of three, how's that?"

"You're the expert," Hake said. "What would happen if you programmed it for all, what is it?, all nine?"

"Why not?" She tapped quickly and sat back. Nothing happened.

"Shouldn't you start it?" he asked after a moment.

"I did start it, Horny. It's sorting through maybe a thousand works a second, looking for one that has all the things you want. There can't be very many, you know. You're a lot different now than you were in Europe."

"Shit," he said, not looking away from the screen. But that was not very rewarding. They sat for a full moment, and there was no flicker at all.

"I have a friend," said Alys thoughtfully, "Who has an apartment not far from here. I have a key. There's always something in the refrigeration or I could pick up some kind of salad stuff and maybe a bottle of wine—"

"I'm not hungry. Listen, suppose we do find something. What do I do then, read the whole book here?"

"If you want to, Horny. Or if you want hard copy to take home, there's a selector switch on that black thing over there, it'll make



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

microfiche copies for you. Or you can order the book itself on inter-library. Usually takes about a week to get them. I'm really disappointed."

"Well," he said, "it isn't that I don't *like* you, Alys, but—"

She laughed affectionately. "Oh, Horny! I meant the way we're not getting anything. Let me cut back to six items, and see if we come out with a manageable number."

And in fact they did. Six books, about fifteen magazine and journal pieces—and real pay-dirt. A dissertation by a political-science Ph.D. candidate called *The Mechanisms of Covert Power.* A Johns Hopkins conference on "External Forces in National Development." And three or four theses and monographs, all right on Hake's target. "What I really need," he said, surveying the mounting stack of microfiche cards, "is one of these computers for myself. I'll be a year reading all this."

Alys leaned back, stretched and yawned prettily, covering her mouth with the back of her hand. Hake averted his eyes from the deep-necked peasant blouse with its white lacing, and remembered to look at his watch. He was due at Curmudgeon's in forty-five minutes, and how was he going to get rid of Alys? It was a convenience to have the question posed to him in that way, because it spared him the necessity of considering whether he really wanted to get rid of her: wine, salad and a friendly apartment sounded pretty nice, actually.

"Oh, hell," said Alys crossly, bringing her arms down. "There's Jessie."

Hake leaped to his feet. "Come in, come in," he said, astonishing Jessie with his cordiality. "Alys has been showing me how to work this thing and, I must say, she's really been marvelous about it. How are you doing, Jessie? Need any help? I'm sure Alys will give you some pointers. As for me, I've got a couple of errands to run. Suppose I meet you back here at, let's see, say three-thirty? That way we can miss most of the rush hour. . . ."

The building was fifty stories tall in a block of smaller ones; the elevator was high-speed and did not rattle, and the name on the door of the suite of offices was

**Seskyn-Porterous**
**Theatrical Agency**
**"Through These Doors Walk Tomorrow's Stars"**


LIBERATION TOOLS.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The waiting room had seats for twenty people. All were full. A dozen other prospective stars of tomorrow were standing around, pretty dancers and bearded folk singers, nervous comedians and at least ten people who did not look like performers at all. Hake didn't have to wait. He was shown at once into a corner office with immense plate-glass windows, and Curmudgeon was sitting at a tiny, bare, glass-topped desk, his hands folded before him.

He got up and shook hands silently, shaking his head as Hake said hello. "Just a minute," he said, walking to the windows and turning on a strange little buzzer device that rattled irregularly against each of them, and then switching on a radio behind his desk. Just loud enough to be heard over the classical-rock music, he said, "You're punctual, and that's a good way to be. Your physical came through, four-oh; you're in as good shape as you've ever been in your life. What do you say, are you about ready for an assignment?"

"Well," said Hake, "I don't know—"

"Course you don't know. I haven't told you yet. Let me read you something."

He unlocked one of the desk drawers and took out a single sheet of paper in a sealed folder. "Subject, H. Hornswell Hake," he read. "Blah, blah, blah, physical status excellent, blah, here we are. 'Subject has displayed commendable initiative and resourcefulness. He is rated superior in the performance of his duties, and will be recommended for promotion at the first opportunity.'" He dropped the sheet into a metal wastebasket, and watched as it abruptly sprang into flame and consumed itself. Stirring the ashes, he said, "What do you say to that, Hake?"

"I guess I say thank you. What does that mean about a promotion?"

"What it says. You do good work, we reward you. Simple's that. Is there anything you want?"

"Well—new carpets for the church," Hake said, remembering. "Maybe a little car. And, yes, I'd like a computer terminal of my own, if that's not too—"

"Forget the computer," said Curmudgeon. "For now, anyway. Car, all right. Carpets, sure." He made a note for himself on the palm of his hand; craning to see, Hake observed that the whole left palm was covered with cryptic scribbles. "Anyway," he said, "You won't be needing any of that right away. The church is going to close down for the rest of the summer starting next week." He didn't put it as a question; he knew it was so. "I'll see


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the carpets are ready before Labor Day, and you'll get your car—well, get it yourself, whenever you want to. I'll arrange for financing. But right now you're going on a vacation to a dude ranch."

"I am? Why am I?"

"Because you've been given it as a ministerial perquisite," Curmudgeon explained. "Actually, you won't be lounging around the swimming pool and making out with the divorcees. It's basic training for future missions. You'll like it; you're a health nut anyway. You report to Fort Stockton, Texas, a week from Monday for three weeks. Bring jeans, shorts, hiking clothes; bring whatever you like to make it look good, but you won't have much need for neckties or dancing shoes. Any questions?"

"Well—"

Curmudgeon stood up. "It's good you don't have any questions," he said, "because I've got another appointment in two minutes. Watch your mail for tickets and travel information—and when you find out you've won the trip, be sure you act surprised. Meanwhile—*What the hell?*"

There was a muffled thunder-roll outside the windows, which rattled in a more somber rhythm than that of the buzzers at their bases. Curmudgeon sprang to look out, Hake right behind him. East and north, a dozen blocks away, tiny black things were sailing through the sky, followed by a ropy cloud of black smoke shot through with flame.

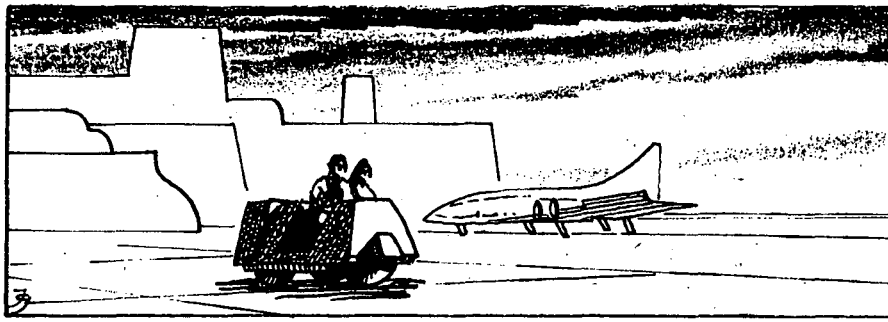
"Christ," said Hake. Some of those black things looked like bodies!

Curmudgeon stared at him narrowly, then relaxed. He took his hand away from his lapel, where it had flown at once, and said, "See what we're up against? That was the guy with the gas truck, I bet. He was one of the New Dorp Irredentists. And that was Madrid money that got them going, you know. Fix the sons of bitches when that Dutch-elm beetle Haversford's got gets into their—well, never mind that. Just remember what you just saw. It'll do more for your morale than fifty lectures under the wire."

New Dorp Irredentists? Dutch-elm beetle in Spain? Under the wire? But before Hake could ask about any of these confusing things he was out in the anteroom again, threading his way through the starlets and tap-dancers, with all the questions unasked; especially including that central question that went: *What made the gas-truck driver do it?*

§ § §

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

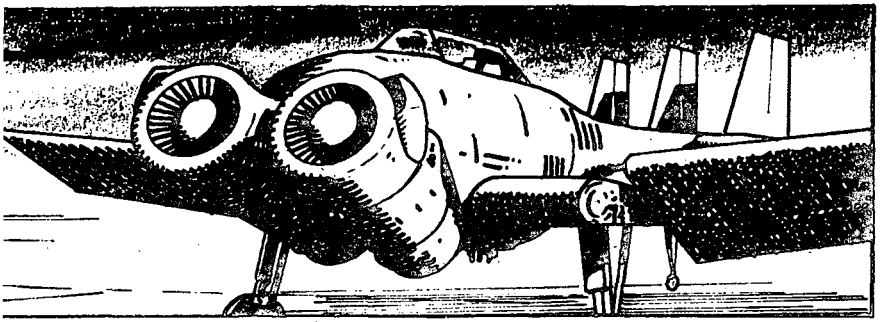


## II

When Hake got out of the slow-jet at Fort Stockton the heat wrapped itself around him at once. He was sweating before he got to the bottom of the ladder, panting as he walked the twenty yards from aircraft to the opening in the fence marked "Gate 1." (There was no Gate 2.) He was met by a young black woman—in ethnicity, not skin color, which was a sort of sunny beige. There was no exchange of recognition signals. Clearly she had been briefed with description and photograph, perhaps also with fingerprints, genetic code and retina-prints, for all Hake knew. There was also the consideration that no one else got off the slow-jet. She came up to him unhesitatingly and said, "You're Hornswell Hake and I'm Deena Fairless. Let's go to the plane." Also unhesitatingly, he went along. She didn't ask if he had checked any baggage. She knew he had not. He had been instructed to take only toilet articles and personal items not to exceed four kilograms, and she assumed he had complied. Fairless pointed to the passenger side of what looked like an old electric golf-cart, got in on the driver's side and was in motion before Hake had fully settled himself in. There was no top. The drive to the end of an auxiliary runway, where a small plane was waiting for them, was only about two minutes, but it was long enough for Hake to think of sunstroke. He followed the woman up a retractable ladder into what he recognized as some sort of old military plane; he did not know enough to be sure of model or function, but it seemed to be one of the vertical-takeoff counter-insurgency gunships that had been popular in the old brushfire wars.

Hake's guide turned out to be Hake's pilot as well. She checked Hake's seat-belt, spoke briefly into the radio, went through a


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



thirty-second checkoff against a printed list, and launched the plane in a climbing turn that made no use of the runway at all. It was a brute-force takeoff in a brute-force kind of airplane, and Hake knew that the fuel that got them into the air would have been enough to have kept his rectory warm all the last winter.

Hake observed that they were flying south and west—Deena Fairless didn't say, but Hake could read the direction well enough from the position of the sun. They flew low, under ten thousand feet, and updrafts from the dry mesas kept them in bouts of turbulence. Fairless didn't talk, or at least not to Hake. She kept up an occasional lip-moving chatter into the radio; he could not hear what was said, but granted it enough importance to refrain from offering conversation. Only as they began to climb over a ridge of hills she leaned toward him and said, "Have you got a lot of fillings in your teeth, Hake?"

"No. Not too many."

"Lucky," she said, looking over the hills.

There was something there to look at. He could not identify it, was not even sure he was seeing what he saw. It looked like pencil-thin searchlight beams winking on and off, tinged with color, one red, two bluish-green. They were very faint except for high patches where they impinged wisps of cirrostratus, and even there they existed only as split-second impressions. As they topped the hill he saw what looked like a tilted plain of chicken wire sloping away on the far side. But he had only a glimpse, and then they were dropping to a short, black-topped landing strip next to a cluster of buildings. Painted on the roof of one low, long shed were the words HAS-TA-VA RANCH. He saw what looked like a row of small and unprosperous motel cabins, a corral with a clump of horses milling around one end, a few stables. The horses



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

did not even look up as the plane screamed down to a rolling stop on the strip, which was the only indication in sight that the place was anything other than an attempt at a tourist attraction, rapidly going broke.

"Welcome to your new home," said Deena Fairless, unstrapping herself and flipping switches off. "You'll love it here."

Hake didn't love it there. He didn't hate it, either; he didn't have time. Or energy. Up at 4:45 AM, and a quarter-mile run before breakfast, snaking among the supports for the wire-field overhead. Ten minutes for the toilets, and then out again. Sometimes for an hour's hand-to-hand combat instruction, flinging each other into hillocks of sand or clumps of buffalo grass—the buffalo grass was softer, but once in a while there was a snake in it. Sometimes for calisthenics. Sometimes for scuba-training, practicing clearing the mask, practicing snatching the mask away from each other—those were good times, because with water-discipline enforced it was about the only time any of them got an all-over bath; but not so good, because with water-discipline a necessity the pool was never changed. Then something sedentary for half an hour's rest: learning to use bugging equipment, learning to know when it was being used on themselves. Making repairs in equipment. Morale—over and over, morale. Then lunch, twenty minutes of it. Then more. And more and more. Hake had tucked a dozen microfiches into his "personal effects" bag, but he never learned if there was a viewer on the premises, because he never even found time to ask.

Hake's fellows included three dozen persons, most of them new trainees like himself, a few old-timers being brought back on line for reassignment, a cross-section of humanity. Hispanic teen-age boys, a glowingly long-legged California blonde, two elderly black professors, a nun. They all shared the same bunkhouse, tucked in the lee of a dune under the wire. They all, somehow, kept up. The only thing they seemed to have in common was that they had little in common—beyond, of course, the purpose of their presence here. If Hake had looked around his commuter bus one morning and seen all of them there he would have considered them a perfectly normal busload of average Americans. They changed; some came, some went. The San Diego blonde was the first to go, to Hake's regret, but a day or two later a New Orleans brunette turned up, along with two middle-aged Japanese ladies from Hawaii. The only constants were the instructors: a one-legged



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

youth for surveillance and debugging, a tiny woman for hand-to-hand and physical training, Deena Fairless for scuba and instrument repair, all of them, taking turns, for the morale lectures. In the first ten days under the wire, Hake never did the same thing twice, and never came to the end of a day without falling instantly into exhausted sleep, regardless of hunger, pain, itches or the occasional mad singing of the wire overhead.

He had not, as it turned out, stayed at Has-Ta-Va Ranch any longer than it took to get into a truck and bounce half a mile under the power rectenna that he had glimpsed from the air. By the time he had been dropped off and set about drawing two sets of underwear, ten pairs of socks and the stoutest hiking boots he had ever had on his feet, he had figured out both what he had seen and why he was there. The training base was under the microwave receiver that supplied most of three states with electricity.

The power came from space. Twenty-two thousand miles straight up from the equator a magnetohydrodynamic generator hung in geosynchronous orbit, sucking electrical energy out of plasma, transmuting it into microwaves, pumping it down to the Ok-Tex-Mex grid. The trouble with a "stationary" orbit is that it can only be stationary directly over the equator somewhere, so the rectenna had to be tilted toward the south: thus the slope of the hill. At 30° north latitude, the tilt did not have to be extreme. And, as a valuable by-product, there was all that land under the wire that was, if not immune, at least resistant to airborne or satellite inspection. Some was used for grazing forty-acre cattle, or the three-five buffalo hybrids that survived better and gained faster, if you could get used to the gamey, sweetish taste of the meat. Some was used, or was sometimes used, for irrigated crops, soy, sorghum or alfalfa. (But not this year, with the water tables sinking.) And some was used by Curmudgeon's people, for the purposes that brought Hake there. Ok-Tex-Mex was not the only huge rectenna bringing down MHD power to pop American toasters and light American homes. SCALAZ, on the Gila River, handled more energy. Three or four others were the same size, and the new one in the Gulf of Mexico off Cape Sable was much larger (when it wasn't being ripped up by tropical storms). But Ok-Tex-Mex was a long way from anything bigger than a dude ranch. There had never been much above the ground, in that part of Texas south of the Permian Basin, to make anyone want to be there; and the stuff that had been below ground had long since been pumped away and burned in the tanks of American cars.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Being under the wire was not so bad, once you got used to a couple of things. The singing of fifteen square kilometers of antennae when the wind was right was sometimes disconcerting. The support columns got in the way. And there was the little problem with the microwave energy itself. The cattle that grazed under it were fed for slaughter, not breeding; there was some question about what sort of descendants they would have. (And the people in the camp underneath? No one seemed to want to discuss it.)

The satellite transmitter was constantly locked onto a corner-reflector at the center of the rectenna's spread. Ninety-nine plus percent of the time it stayed centered there, or no farther from it than the wire could accommodate. The average power density of the beam was comfortably low. Unfortunately, it didn't always stay average. Atmospherics intervened. The interface between air layers became lenses. Focusing one way, the beam spread over more area than the rectenna accepted, and some of the power was lost. Focusing another, the power density climbed. That was when dental fillings became significant. In a dense beam, the result was the damnedest toothache anyone could have. For this the management of the training camp offered aspirin, or even rough-and-ready extraction if desired, and nothing else. (The good part was that the worst lumps in the beam seldom lasted more than an hour or two. Only enough to drive a sufferer out of his mind for a while. Not enough to interfere with his training.)

What was left of Hake's convalescent frailty was sweated out of him in running, knee-bends, and hand-to-hand combat, an eclectic discipline that seemed to include judo, *le savate,* sapping-and-stabbing and the dirtier kinds of Saturday-night punchups. *That* wasn't bad. Hake hadn't had his strong male body long enough to take it for granted, and when he sent the Louisiana charmer flying and dropped one of the professors to the ground, his knee on the man's throat, two seconds after they had jumped him from behind, he heard himself growling with pleasure. There was a section on how to make plastic explosives on a base of Vaseline, with ingredients purchasable in any drugstore, and one on the use of Blue Box and Black Box penetration of telecommunication networks. They weren't bad, either. The technology was fascinating to the MIT dropout who had not thought of any of those things for years. They trained with a large selection of electronic cameras and microphones, and each of the trainees in turn took the equipment to spy on the others. The prize was when the nun



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came up with a two-minute sniperscope tape of one of the teenagers masturbating behind a cluster of yucca. Hake was impressed. Not so much by the nun's technical skill as by Tigrito's energy. Hake did not seem to have the energy left after a day to think of sex. (Or not in the first week; but then, Tigrito had been there for four.) When Hake thought of sex, or indeed when he let his mind drift in any direction at all away from remembering to spit into his facemask and rehearsing the nomenclature of the parts of the rifle-microphone, was only during the indoctrination lectures. Sprawled out on the sparse grass, the sun beating through the wire overhead, they listened to Deena or Fortnum or Captain Pegleg going on interminably about their purpose in being there:

"The United States is threatened as never before in its history—" Pegleg drumming on his outstretched artificial limb with the fingers of one hand, while the words droned out of him as though he were himself a tape—"by a world in which our rightful defense forces are stymied by red tape and international agreements, any questions? Right." There weren't any questions. There was a difference of viewpoint, to be sure, but Hake did not feel a necessity to air it, and besides Mary Jean was stretched out before him with her hands folded behind her head and he was enjoying what he saw.

Or, "Under the constitution and laws of our land—" this was old Fortnum, who stood up when he talked to them and insisted on alert posture from his audience—"we are charged with securing the blessings of democracy to ourselves and our posterity, which we got to do by keeping our nation strong and secure, any questions?" There weren't any questions for Fortnum, either. He was the only one of the instructors who had the habit of imposing extra duty for misdemeanors, and attracting attention was usually a misdemeanor.

Deena Fairless was the only one who held Hake's attention as a speaker. For one thing, she didn't sit or stand but moved around among them, sometimes rousting them awake with a toe when the after-lunch heat began to put one or another of them away; for another, she talked about more interesting things. "By presidential directive, we are limited to covert, non-lethal operations on foreign soil only. All three things, remember. Covert. Non-lethal. Foreign. Now, if there are no questions—" she barely paused, but there weren't any questions then, either—"let me explain some of the things you've been seeing around here."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And that was how Hake found out that agent training was only one of the functions of the installation. There was a research-and-development underground—literally underground, dug into the side of the slope itself—a few miles away, and that was where things like the IR-spectacles and the foamboats came from. There was a place euphemistically called "debriefing". None of them were *ever* to go near it. Nor likely to, since it was constantly patrolled with attack dogs. Deena Fairless didn't say who was "debriefed", but the trainees formed their opinions; and if any of them happened to be taken out by The Other Side, decided they could expect to wind up in some other "debriefing" place at some other point on the surface of the earth. There was even a small writers'-colony place—that was the one that was actually housed at the Has-Ta-Va Ranch itself—where psychological warfare texts were prepared.

And then, when God was kind, they were permitted to watch films. They saw notable agency triumphs of the past, the counterfeiting-operations that broke the Bank of England and the price-rigging that bankrupted ten thousand Indian, Filipino, and Indochinese rice growers. Those, they were given to understand, were only a tiny fraction of the successful ventures of the agency. Those were the blown ones, where the Other Side, or more often the Other Sides, knew what had happened. There were still huger projects that had never been detected. And that, they understood, because they were told so day after day, with relentless insistence, was the Optimal Project: to do something that weakened some part of the rest of the world relative to the United States without ever being found out.

And, of course, at the same time the Other Sides were doing all they possibly could to the United States. The water lilies that were choking out every slow-moving stream in the Northeast, the "Hell, No, I Won't Mow!" revolt of condominium owners in Florida, the California stoop-labor strikes and the truckers' go-slow that jointly had kept fresh vegetables rotting in the fields and warehouses while consumers paid triple prices for canned goods—all had been traced to foreign intervention, playing the Agency's game from the other side of the board. They were doing it now. Even under the microwave antenna, even fresh and new to the Southwest as he was, Hake could see that the sparse grass was browning and dying. The Other Side, they said, was cloud-napping again, projecting bromide smoke into the big cumulus over the Pacific and stealing their rain before it ever had a chance



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to reach America.

Perhaps Hake's microfiches could have told him when the game had begun, if he had had time to read them. Peer as hard as he could into the future, he could not see where it would end.

Even Southwest Texas got cold at two in the morning. Surprising cold, mean cold. Overhead the ten thousand Texas stars winked through the moaning wire, and the north wind that strummed the rectenna froze Hake at the same time. And froze Tigrito and Mary Jean and Sister Florian and the two Hawaiian ladies; they were worse off than Hake, not being New Jersey-bred. Deena Fairless seemed comfortable enough, but then she was the one who had rousted them all out of bed at midnight for this training exercise. She had had time to prepare for the night march—including, Hake was pretty sure, wool socks and thermal underwear.

Mary Jean, propped against the same three-cornered pillar as Hake, wriggled closer to him. He did not suppose that it was affection. She was a long way from Louisiana. What she was after was warmth. Nevertheless he glanced at Deena, who said, "Stay awake, that's all." But Hake's problem was not sleepiness. Hake's problem was that Deena had shattered one of the truly fine erotic dreams of his recent memory when she came in with her flashlight and twisted him awake by the toe. He still wasn't quite out of it. Mary Jean certainly did not smell like a dream girl—more like a real one who had been worked hard and bathed insufficiently—but some synapse, cell, or process in his brain unerringly identified a yin for his yang, and the real person drowsing against his shoulder merged with the dream one he had abandoned so reluctantly.

"Stay awake, I said!"

"Sorry, Deena," Mary Jean apologized, shifting to a more alert posture. "When are we going to get moving?"

"When it's clear."

"When will it be clear?"

"When Tiger comes back and tells us so." Deena hesitated, then said, "Move around if you want to. Keep your voices down." They were in an arroyo that bent sharply just ahead of them; good cover from sight, as the sighing wire overhead was good cover for sound. At this point the antenna was at least seventy feet above them, but Hake could see it is a winking tracery of scarlet spiderwebs, faint but clear, as it reflected the pulse of the radar


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

corner beacons. In fact, it was astonishing how much he could see by starlight, now that his eyes had had two hours to adapt. Deena Fairless was unscrewing what looked like a huge tube of toothpaste, head cocked in concentration, squeezing out a dab of what it contained onto her finger.

"What's that?" asked Beth Hwa, sitting cross-legged, spine straight and alert.

"That's what we're going to stick up a cow's ass," said Deena. There was the sort of silence that follows a wholly unsuccessful joke, until Deena said, "No kidding. That's the job for tonight. We're going to move in on the three-five herd, locate the heifers and smear some of this on their, excuse the medical terms, their private parts. I don't mean rectums, I mean vaginas. But if you can't figure out which is which you have to do both."

The silence protracted itself, but changed in kind; now it was the silence that surrounds a group of persons wondering if somebody was playing a very bad joke of which they were the butt. Deena chuckled. "It's a simulation," she explained. "Represents an actual operation, of which you may, or may not, hear more before you leave here."

"Some operation," snarled Sister Florian.

"Oh, you're excused from that part," said Deena. "You're going to be our lookout."

"I don't need to be excused from anything," the nun said angrily. "I'm only saying I hate it."

"Sure you do. But you'll thank me for it some day. Why, the time will come when you'll all look back on these good times under the wire and say—hold it!"

A loose stone slid down the arroyo slope, followed by Tigrito, sulking back from his patrol. "No cowboys anywhere I could see," he reported. "Hey, man. Let me get some of that heat." He sat down next to Mary Jean on the other side, and put his arm around her.

"What about the herd? Did you find them?"

"Oh, sure, man. Nice and sleepy, 'bout half a mile away."

"Then we go. You too, Tiger. On your feet, Mary Jean, and from now on no talking. Tiger leads, I go last. When he has the herd in sight he stops and you all take a handful of this gunk and start smearing."

"How do we tell which is a heifer? In fact, what's a heifer?"

"If you can't tell you just do them all. Move out, Tiger. Glasses on, everybody."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Through the IR spectacles Hake saw the scene transformed. There was residual heat in the slope of the hill, so that they were moving over dully glowing rocks; Tigrito, ahead of him, was bright hands and head moving around a much darker torso, and the wire overhead was a dazzle of bright spots, obscuring the stars. He could not even see the red and blue-green laser beacons through it, and when he took his eyes away it took some time to adjust to the relative darkness. It was a long, hard downhill crawl, then a harder uphill scramble. There the top of a ridge had been shaved away to accommodate the rectenna and the wire was no more than ten feet above the ground. They all walked stooped and half-crouched across the ridge and didn't straighten out until they were sliding down the loose fill the bulldozers had pushed onto the other side. It was said that touching the rectenna might not kill. None of them wanted to find out.

The three-eighths buffalo/five-eighths cattle hybrid herd was resting peacefully at the bottom of the slope, uninterested in the human beings creeping toward them. The three-fives were bred for stupidity as well as for meat and milk, and had been successful all around. What they liked to eat was the blossom from yucca—which is why, Hake learned, the yucca's other name was "buffalo grass"—and on that diet they fattened to slaughter size in three years.

Deena gathered the troops around her and, one by one, squeezed a sticky, oily substance into each palm, and waved them toward the herd. They picked their way down the sliding, uneasy surface. Hake slipped and fell, and as he recovered himself he heard Tigrito whine, "Hey, man! You wasn't here before!"

A bright light overwhelmed the IR lenses—Deena's; it showed a man in a Stetson and levis, pointing a gun at Tigrito. "Got ya," the man crowed. "Y'under arrest, ever' one of you, get your hands up!"

Mean rage filled Hake's skull. The bastard had a gun! If Hake had had one of his own—he didn't finish the thought, but his fingers were curling around a trigger that wasn't there. And he wasn't alone. Tigrito, still whining and complaining, was moving slowly toward the man, and behind the cowboy Sister Florian reached out for his throat. Not quietly enough; the man half heard her and started to turn, and Tigrito launched himself on him, bowled him to the ground. The gun went flying, Tigrito's hand rose and fell.

And it was all over. Tigrito got up to his knees, still holding the


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rock he had caught up to bash the man's skull with. "Did I kill the fucker?" he demanded.

Deena was bending over him with the light. "Not yet, anyway. Hellfire. All right, let's get on with it. Sister, you stay here and keep an eye on him. The rest of you, go get those cows!"

What Hake retained longest of the incident was a startling fact. He had been willing to kill the cowboy. If he had been asked the question as a theoretical matter, before the fact, he would have denied the possibility emphatically. Ridiculous! He had no reason. He had nothing against the man. There was no real stake riding on the incident. He was certainly not a killer! But when the moment came, he knew that if he had had a gun he would have pulled the trigger.

Actually, the man had not died. They had gone about their farcical task of slapping goo under the cattle's tails, and then taken turns to carry the still unconscious man all the long way under the wire to the barracks. As far as Hake knew, he was alive still; at least he had been when the truck from Has-Ta-Va carried him away with a concussion and possible skull fracture, but breathing. The six of them looked at each other in the barracks, hands, faces and clothes smeared with green paint—it was not until they reached the lighted dugout that they knew what Deena had spread in their palms. As Hake fell into bed, for the forty-five minutes before reveille, he thought there might be repercussions. He also thought he knew what had been so strange about the expressions on the faces of all his comrades. They had all been very close to grinning.

But in the morning, when Fortnum fell them out in the predawn light, no word was said about the incident. They ran their mile, swilled down their breakfast, spent their hour on the obstacle course and showed up for Deena's class in computer-bugging. After ten minutes of drill on the nomenclature of the machine Hake could not stand it any more. "Deena," he said, "how is the guy?"

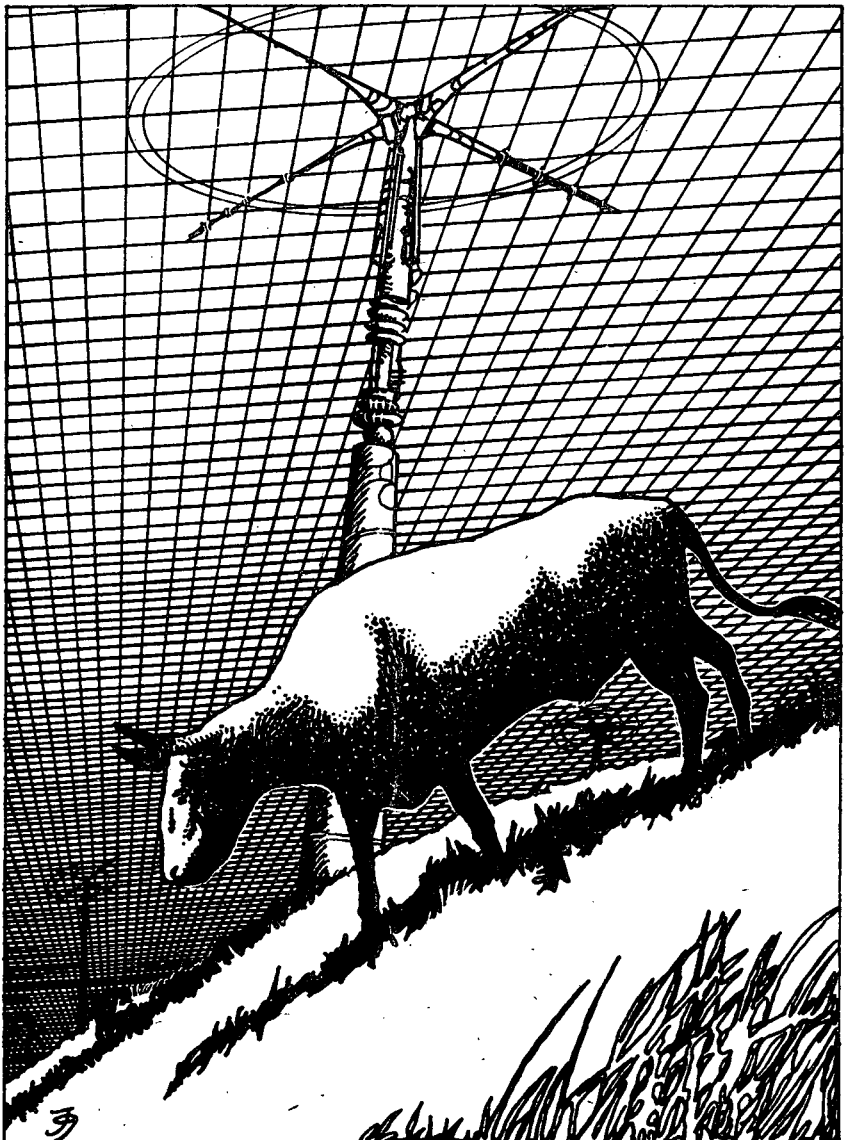
She paused between "bit" and "byte" and looked at him thoughtfully. "He'll be all right," she said at last.

"Are we in trouble?"

"You're always in trouble until you get out of this place," she said. "No special trouble that the Agency can't handle. It's happened before."

The whole group knew about what had happened, and one of


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ones who had stayed behind put his hand up. "Deena, what the hell were you-all doing out there, anyway?"

Deena glanced at her watch. "Well—tell you what. Pegleg's off with the plane, Fortnum's gone to pick up supplies, and I have to make a report. I'm going to leave you on your own for, let's see, ninety minutes. Only, so you shouldn't waste your time, you've got two assignments, with prizes for the winners. First, see if you can figure out what the exercise was last night. Second, I want each one of you to think up an Agency project. You'll be judged on originality, practicality, and effectiveness, and so you'll know it's fair I'm going to let Fortnum do the judging."

"How do we find out about the exercise?" asked Beth Hwa.

"That's your problem," Deena said agreeably.

"What are the prizes?" Hake asked.

"That's easy. The first prize-winner in each category is the one that doesn't get punishment duty. So long; you've got eighty-eight minutes left."

They had never been on their own before in the middle of the day, were not sure how to handle it. A dozen of the group drifted toward the scuba pool, Hake included; also, most of the six who had gone on the exercise. The reasons had nothing to do with the problems. It was a way of getting some of the paint residue off, and a way, too, of waking up that underslept part of their brains that wanted more than anything else to crawl back into the bunkhouse. They stripped down to the all-purpose underwear and quenched themselves in the tepid and stagnant water.

Then the guessing began.

"Maybe we were practicing how to immobilize, I don't know, cavalry or something. With like sleeping drugs."

"Shee-it, man! What cavalry?"

"Well—race horses, maybe. Sometimes they give you anesthetics through an enema, don't they?"

"Or maybe it was going to be some kind of poison, to kill off somebody's beef supplies."

"Come on, Beth! You think the Agency'd send people around to massage ten or twenty million cow's asses? Wait a minute. Maybe in a real job it wouldn't be paint but, I don't know, honey. And it would attract flies, and they'd spread disease—?"

Fanciful ideas. The group seemed to generate a lot of them. Sprawled in the sun, under the shadeless wire, Hake's tired brain was not up to the task of trying to guess whether any of those



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ideas were more fanciful than what he already knew the Agency had done. Sitting near him, Mary Jean leaned over and whispered in his ear. "You got any better ideas?" He shook his head. "Then maybe we should start on the other project, I mean thinking up a real job. Wait a minute, I've got some paper."

While she was rummaging in her shoulder bag Hake leaned back and closed his eyes, letting the talk drift over him. Some of the things they had guessed as explanations for the mission last night might work as project proposals, he thought. They were still going at it avidly—as though each and every one of them had taken it as a personal challenge. How had they all got so bloodthirsty?

"—some kind of irritating acid, make them stampede—"

"—constipate them till they bloat up and die—"

"—smells bad to the bulls, or, hey! Maybe bulls get turned off by green paint!"

"No, wait a minute, Tigrito. Look at it the other way. Suppose it was some kind of chemical that interfered with intercourse. Maybe made the bull lose its, uh, erection."

The Hawaiian woman sat up straight. "Better idea!" she cried. "Why waste it on bulls? I'm going to try that out for the other assignment: some kind of chemical that you give women, I don't know, put it in their food maybe, that sterilizes them. Or makes them unattractive to men."

"Or it wouldn't have to be a chemical, Beth," said the black professor. "Subsidize the fashion industry, get them to go back to the bustle or the maxiskirt or something like that."

"Or better! How about starting a back-to-religion thing? Get all the women to become nuns."

The professor said thoughtfully, "That actually happened, you know, back in the Middle Ages. So many people taking vows of celibacy that the French kings got worried about the population drop. Only that would take pretty long to be effective—twenty or thirty years before it mattered much, and who knows what the world would be like then?—oh, hi, Sister. We were just talking about nuns—"

Sister Florian sat down, looking pleased with herself. "I heard what you were talking about." Her usually severe face was conspicuously good-humored.

"Okay, Sister," said Tigrito. "What you got goin' for you? You figure out what we was up to last night?"

"No," she said cheerfully, "I didn't figure it out. I *found* it out.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You all took off and left me alone with the computer. I gave it the unlock command and ordered it to look up Agency projects involving large-mammal genital areas."

"Come off it, Sister! How'd you do that?"

"Well, I set up a matrix of large mammal genitals, chemical or biological agents, Agency projects—"

"No, no! I mean about the unlock command."

She smiled sunnily. "I watch what she does, Tigrito. She types out the date of the month, plus two, and then her own last name. Then it's open. So it took it a little while to hunt, but it came up with equine gonorrhea."

"Equine gonorrhea?"

"There was an epidemic of it in America back in the '70s. Now there's a new strain that's infectious for all large mammals, and antibiotic-resistant, too. I guess what we're going to do, some of us, sometimes, is infect breed cows, so that they'll infect stud bulls, so we'll knock out a big chunk of a cattle-breeding program. Somewhere. My own guess is maybe Argentina. Maybe England or Australia? Could be anywhere. Anyway," she said, "I wrote it all down and time-stamped it and left it on Deena's desk, so that's that." And she folded her hands in her lap and beamed around at them.

But Hake was no longer listening. A chain of associations had formed in his mind. Nuns. Convents. People flocking to religious orders. A back-to-religion movement. He began to write quickly with the stub of a pencil Mary Jean had provided him: "Religious leaders like Sun Myung Moon, Indian gurus, Black Muslims and others have effectively taken significant numbers of persons out of the work force in America. Proposal: Charismatic religious leaders be identified and evaluated. Where they may be effective they can be subsidized or—"

He pulled his feet back just in time to avoid having them stepped on as Tigrito, stalking furiously around the scuba pool, stopped in front of him. The youth grinned down at Mary Jean. "Hey, let's pick up where we left off," he said, clumping himself down between them. Hake instinctively made room as the boy took Mary Jean into his arms.

"Watch it," Hake said irritably.

"Oh, man! I *am* watchin' it, been watchin' it a long time, now I'm ready for touchin' it and squeezin' it—shit, lady!" He went sprawling into Hake's lap as Mary Jean's elbow, traveling no more than eight inches, got him just under the ribs. Hake shoved



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him away.

"Fuck off, Tigrito," said Mary Jean.

"Yeah," said Hake. The youth glared at him, then rolled to his feet and came up with his arms spread and curved.

"Lady tells me to fuck off, that's her business," he said. "Ain't yours, mother-fucker."

Hake was on his feet by then too, his arms automatically responding by coming to the grappling position, but he took a shuffling half-step back. It wasn't really his fight, he told himself. If anyone's, Mary Jean's, who could handle it fine by herself.

"Chicken-shit too," jeered Tigrito, and feinted a kick at Hake's belly.

Hake had an immense respect for Tigrito as a brawler, having lost a dozen falls to him in the ritualized hand-to-hand on the training field. But the part of his mind that evaluated and weighed was not operative then. When Tigrito's foot came up Hake sidestepped and caught it; as Tigrito spilled backward he gripped Hake's arms and pulled him over his head, flying; Hake twisted in mid-air and kneed the boy in the chin. In ten seconds it was all over, Hake kneeling on the boy's chest and lifting his head to thump it on the rough cement.

"Dear God," came Deena's voice from behind. "Leave you guys alone for a few minutes and what do I find? Hold it right there, killer. Fight's over. You're all on punishment detail tonight."

When he finally reached bed that midnight Hake was so exhausted that sleep was out of reach. He tossed for a while and then stumbled into the latrine to write his compulsory postcards. One for Jessie Tunman, a gorge on the Pecos River: *Having a fine time, getting a lot of rest, see you soon.* One to go on the church bulletin board: *Miss you all, but will be back full of energy for the church year*: that was a herd of three-five hybrids, with a cowboy in a helicopter moseyin' them along. They were each supposed to send three postcards a week, but Hake had fought it out and got the number reduced. He didn't have three people to send postcards to. Apart from the church, he didn't have anybody.

Crawling back to his bed, he wondered what the church would have thought of their battling minister that day, street-fighting with a barrio kid. Alys, at least, might have been delighted. And it would be very nice to have Alys delighted, in some ways, he thought, tossing angrily and very aware of Mary Jean's tiny snores two bunks away. He counted up. He had been under the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wire for eleven days. It seemed longer. He was not exactly the same person who had flown west from Newark. He was not at all sure what person he was, but the old Reverend Hake would not have fought over a woman.

And the twelfth day, and the thirteenth day, and the fourteenth day came and went, and everything outside the state of Texas receded farther and farther from his thoughts. The people who mattered were Deena and Tigrito and Beth Hwa and Sister Florian and Pegleg and Mary Jean, especially Mary Jean. On the fifteenth day, behind the bunkhouse, they kissed. There was no conversation. He simply followed her around the building. When she turned his hands were on her, and for three or four minutes their tongues were wild in each other's mouths; and then he released her and she went her way and he went his. On the sixteenth day the whole crew was assigned to spraying defoliant on the three-five pasture—the animals cropped the yucca so heavily that every once in a while the inedible plants had to be killed off, to give the buffalo grass a chance to come back. By the time they came back Hake had solved his sexual problem, and so had Mary Jean. Wolfing down their food that night they sat touching on the wooden bench. Deena was amused. Sister Florian was tolerant. Tigrito was sulky. And Beth Hwa, that quiet, middle-aged wife of an avocado shipper from Hilo, intercepted Mary Jean on the way out of the mess hall and handed her something. Mary Jean showed it to Hake, grinning; it was a pillbox. "In case we got caught short," she explained.

The remainder of the three weeks began to look more attractive. But on the seventeenth day Fortnum told them the Congressional Oversight Committee was coming around for its annual inspection, and they all better look sharp, and that night everything was changed. Pegleg tucked them in with the news that there was going to be a special assignment for the morrow, and in the morning he told them what it was:

"This is not, repeat not, a training mission," he singsonged. "This is the real thing. You will be given full gear for an extended stay in the open, and the whole class is going to participate. Five of you will go by plane to Del Rio. The rest will be trucked to Big Bend National Park. We gonna have ourselves a wetback hunt!"

"Wetbacks?"

"Hell, yes, Tigrito! You ought to know what a wetback is. Got too many Mexes coming in and taking our jobs, you know? And



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it's up to us to stop them."

Hake said, "Wait a minute. I thought the presidential directive limited us to actions outside the United States."

"Shit, man. They *come* from outside the United States, don't they? You're never gonna get anyplace in the Agency, you keep coming up with stuff like that. Now, you listen to me. We're going to go down to the border and we're going to make friends with the wetbacks. Then we're going to track back to find out where they're coming in, and track forward to where they're going. Any of you do good, you'll likely get yourselves sent to St. Louis and Chicago and maybe even New York to find where they're going there. There's not going to be no direct action against them, that's for the Immigration. We're just going to locate them and get the evidence. That's good duty. So don't fuck it up."

Ten minutes to pack. They looked at each other, and Tigrito announced that he was going to get to Chi if he had to kill for it, and Sister Florian suspected that it was all just a scheme to get them out of the way while the Oversight Committee inspected the installation, and Hake and Mary Jean tried to estimate their chances of being on the same truck. Or plane. But, in the event, Hake never saw the wonders of wetback life in the big cities. Just as the trucks were about to leave he was pulled off the detachment and ordered to the office of the training director and there, sitting on a wicker chair on the second-floor porch of the main building of Has-Ta-Va Ranch, talking on a hush-phone, was Curmudgeon.

"I didn't expect to see you here," said Hake.

"Course you didn't," said Curmudgeon, putting down the phone. "You're going back to Europe."

"I am? Why am I? What have you got for me to spread this time, leprosy?"

Curmudgeon looked at him thoughtfully. "Leprosy? Oh, no, Hake, that wouldn't be any good. Hard to infect anybody. And the incubation period's much too long. That job you did last month, that was the kind of thing. Did you know German absenteeism's up eighty percent for the month? And, naturally," he said, "our laboratories have just announced a real breakthrough in immunization. We've got enough material for sixty million shots right now. We're selling it all over the world, and making a nice few bucks for the balance of payments. But anyway, that kind of thing was only your first mission, Hake. You couldn't really be



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expected to do anything independently. No. But now we think you're ready for the big time, and I really liked your religion proposal."

It took Hake a second to remember the project he had been outlining next to the scuba pool, just before his fight with Tigrito. He had turned it in and heard no more about it. "I—I didn't think anyone paid any attention to it."

"Hell, yes, Hake! It's a fascinating idea. If we could find a European Sun Myung Moon, or even some good messianic leader—why, we'd back him to the hilt. There are new sects springing up in Europe. The important thing is somebody who has enough personal charisma to make a good pitch. Any thoughts on what sort of thing we should look for?"

"Well—actually," Hake said, warming up, "I did think more about it. It would be good to find someone with a special appeal to industrial workers. Or miners."

"That's the idea, Hake!"

"Of course, I'd need some research facilities, to look up proselytizing religions—"

"Sure you would, but not now. You won't have time. You've got to catch a bus out on the highway in two hours. Then you'll fly to Capri."

"Capri? What the hell do I want in Capri?"

"That's what the orders say," Curmudgeon explained. "You'll be met. When you get there they'll tell you why that has to be where you're going."

"But—my books, for research! I'll need them. And clothes. I'm not dressed for a trip to Italy."

"The clothes are all taken care of, Hake. There's somebody in Long Branch packing a suitcase for you right now—we've, you know, arranged a letter with your signature for your housekeeper. The clothes'll be waiting for you when you get there."

"But my church is expecting me back next week! And what about the rest of the training course here?"

"You'll probably be there in a week," said Curmudgeon. "And as to the course—why, you've just graduated."

## III

Bus to Odessa, prop plane to Dallas-Fort Worth, jet to Rome, with ninety minutes of racing back and forth on the back of a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moped to collect a suitcase, jet to Capodochino Airport, monorail to the Bay, hovercraft to Capri. Hake had left Has-Ta-Va Ranch at two in the afternoon. Fourteen hours and eight time zones later, he was bouncing across the Bay at what local time said was noon but what his interior body clock could not identify at all. What he was sure of was that he was very, very tired, and rather close to being seasick. He had not expected a hovercraft ride to be so choppy. Each wave-top slapped fiercely against the bottom of the vessel, and his queasiness was not helped, as he landed, by the fact that the hovership terminal stank of rotting fish.

As promised, he was met. A young woman in a black ruffled shirt and black velvet cut-offs pushed her way past the would-be guides and the vendors of Capri bells and said, "Father Hake? Yes? Give me the ticket for your bag, please. I will meet you at the car park."

She seemed familiar to Hake, but in his precarious condition he could not identify her. When she arrived at the car park it was in a three-wheeled electric scooter, open to the air, and any impulse toward conversation was quelled by the noise of the traffic. Capri was hot. Steamy hot and smoggy hot; the fish smell was from tens of thousands of dead little fingerlings floating belly-up in the bay or washed up on the sand, and it stayed with them all the drive up a precipitous road. Then, at the top of a bluff, they reached a pink stucco hotel, and the smell was less fish and more oil.

The woman marched Hake through the lobby and into an elevator, shushing him until they got to the fifth floor. A Chinese couple were just coming out of a room across from the elevator, and evidently having trouble with the lock. The girl leaped to help them, closed it securely, rattled the knob, returned their key and accepted their thanks, and then let Hake into the room next door. "Get some rest, Father Hake," she advised. "I will call for you in the morning."

She gave him his key, and closed the door behind her.

Hake found himself in a room roughly the size of his parsonage porch in Long Branch, long enough for two normal rooms and with a balcony stretching out into the Italian sun to make it longer. Piggery! It was more luxury than Hake had ever been used to. He detected a faint twinge in the place where he kept his social conscience, and another part of his conscience was telling him that he really should be thinking about the question of proselytizing religions. But he also found that it was not hard to convince himself that, after two weeks under the wire, a person was


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entitled to a little comfort. He kicked off his shoes and explored the room.

The bed was oval, and covered with tasseled red velvet. When Hake sat on the edge of it to rub his feet it gave his bottom no resistance. A water bed! He wound up with his posterior at about ankle level and a rigid board under his knees, and the returning ripples dandled him up and down for minutes. Next to the bed was what looked like the instrument panel of an airplane, buttons, dials, switches. Some were clear enough. The sunburst was for the lights. The stylized figures of a maid and a waiter for calling service. The remote control was for the television set. Others were opaque to Hake's perceptions. But there would be time for that. He switched on the television and lay back on the rippling bed, gratefully chill beneath him after the hot ride from the hoverport.

At that moment the lights and TV went out.

It was not just his room. The liquid-crystal illuminated hotel sign over the reflecting pool was out, too; so was the golden glow-panel over his balcony, recklessly going even in the middle of the day. There had been a power failure.

Since power interruptions were so familiar a part of Hake's everyday life he began at once to catalogue what problems it might bring. Lack of heat, not a problem. Lack of reading lights—well, apart from the fact that it was broad daylight outside the window, he was starved for sleep anyhow. Lack of air-conditioning? Maybe that would be a problem. He opened the French doors to the balcony, just in case. Elevators, TV, telephones were no immediate concern of his.

So there was, really, no problem. It seemed a heaven-sent injunction to catch up on his rest. He threw his clothes off, stripped back the velvet spread and summer-thin blanket and in a moment was wholly unconscious on the delightfully cool and quivering bed.

He woke up with the sound of an angry Italian voice bellowing at him, and discovered at once that the cool was no longer delightful.

It was the middle of the night. The lights were on, in his room and outside. The voice was from the television set, which had come on along with the lights and air-conditioner. The breeze outside had turned cool, and the air-conditioner was making it cooler still. In fact, he was freezing. He fumbled the sound of the TV



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down, and the voice of the Italian man in the commercial, who appeared to be enraged because his wife had put the wrong brand of cheese on his pasta, dwindled to a furious whimper.

Hake puzzled over his watch—the bedside clock was of course useless—and decided that he had slept the clock around, plus a little extra. It seemed to be about two in the morning, local time. He did not feel rested, but he was awake and, worse, shivering cold. He managed to get the air-conditioner turned off and the window closed, then climbed back on the bed with thin blanket and stiff spread pulled around him. It was not enough. The water under him sucked the heat away, and there was no heat in the room. That was not surprising. Who would have expected to need central heating in Capri in the summer? He told himself that his body warmth would soon enough make the bed comfortable, and to distract himself he tried to decipher what was happening on the television set. It seemed to be showing straight commercials: cheese, wine, then a sports car, then the national lottery; a deodorant, an aphrodisiac (or perhaps just a perfume; but the bulge in the trunks of the handsome male model was pretty explicit), and then what appeared to be an institutional propaganda piece. It showed a young Italian youth, clearly stoned out of his mind. A sad baritone voice-over sighed, *"Ecco, guaglio, perche fare cosi?"* The youth shrugged and giggled. The scene dissolved to the great cellar of a winery. In the vaulted room plastic kegs of wine were tumbling majestically off a conveyor belt, while at the far end of the chamber was a loading dock with a waiting and empty truck. The camera's eye narrowed down on an abandoned forklift truck, alone in the middle of the room. Hake could not understand the sorrowful Italian-language voice-over, but the message was clear enough. The forklift operator was away from his post. The wine was not getting onto the truck. The deduction that the missing operator was the blind-stoned kid was confirmed at once, as the scene changed to the following morning. The young man, no longer stoned, now repentant, stood humbly beside a white-haired man carrying a clipboard. Hake recognized the man at once, him or his double. He had seen him a hundred times on American television, tapping his glasses on a desk as he sold everything from stomach-acid neutralizers to hemorrhoid salve. By the end of the commercial the prodigal forklift operator had cleared away the backlog, the trucks were loaded and rumbling away, and the conveyor belt once more brought in its endless chain of kegs. *Marijuana si—PCP no,* said the fatherly baritone,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the same legend appeared on the screen.

Interesting enough, but Hake was still freezing. His body warmth was not up to the demands imposed on it by the heat-sink of twelve hundred liters of cold water.

He was still exhausted, but he accepted the fact that there was no way for him to get back to sleep without Something Being Done. He got up and dressed. By and by he began to feel less chilled, but no less sleepy. And every time he lay down on that bed, even through clothes, spread and covers, he could feel the heat soak right out of him into the water.

It was no good.

He turned on the light and opened his bags. The little shoulder-carrier he had brought from under the wire had a sweater in it, but as neither it nor he had been washed for some time when he last wore it he was not anxious to put it on. The suitcase Curmudgeon's minion had packed for him in Long Branch had nothing at all. Almost nothing he could wear, in fact. The Agency expediter had packed as full a Capri wardrobe as Hake's closets permitted, but unfortunately had not known that his measurements had changed. No doubt it was Hake's own fault for not throwing out what he could no longer wear. But the shorts, tank tops and sport jackets that had served him well enough as a 145-pound weakling in a wheelchair would no longer go around him, and the few newer garments were not warm.

Still, as long as he was up and moving about he was warm enough. And as long as he was awake he might as well be doing something.

Among the other things he had brought from under the wire were his microfiches—musty, dinged at the edges, but no doubt still serviceable if he could find something to read them with. Was there a fiche scanner on the television set?

There was. The instructions varnished to the top of the set were unfortunately in Italian, but the mechanism looked simple enough. What he also found was that the television set was a lot fancier than any he had seen in Long Branch. There was also something described as *Solo per personne mature—film interactiva*. It appeared to have a handset controlling it, but it did nothing at all until he realized that the coin slot next to it needed to be fed. It was just the right size for a *cinquanta lire nuove* piece, and immediately he had inserted the coin the broadcast channel disappeared and was replaced by an extremely good-looking Oriental girl reclining in the pose of the Naked Maja.


LICENSED TO JVL.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Technically the set was astonishing. Hake by trial and error found that the handset would let him view a whole catalogue of nude women, and men, too; that another control on the set allowed him to rotate the figure and zoom in and out on any desired part; and even that he could bring two figures together and manipulate them around each other. While he was trying to discover whether the picture showed them actually in contact or merely superimposed photographically his coin ran out and the screen went dark.

That had been interesting. It had also been somewhat unsettling. Hake got up and explored the rest of the room's facilities. Under the TV was something called *Servizio,* which turned out to be a little refrigerator and bar stocked with whiskey, wine, fruit juices and beer. He thought for a moment of getting drunk enough to supply French central heating and going back to sleep; but that way, he suspected, lay pneumonia. Still, one beer wasn't a bad idea. Carrying it, he checked out the bathroom. The toilet seat vibrated on command, he found. The shower head pulsed, and so, he discovered, did the spray in the bidet. Behind a panel near the door was a coffee maker and a bun warmer, and when he sat on the edge of the still chill bed to drink a cup of hot coffee he kicked something and found that the bed, too, could be made to ripple rhythmically by pushing a switch. It was quite an inventive room.

It was not, however, a room to be alone in: everything urged company, and Hake didn't have any.

What was worse, one of the girls on the television had reminded him of Mary Jean. He sat daydreaming of Mary Jean as a possible subject for *film interactiva,* and then of Alys, and of Leota, and realized he had a problem. It was a problem most men face, some of them very often, but Hake growing up in a wheelchair had learned to sublimate and to repress that problem, and the new Hake, the muscular Hake of the bar-bells and the two-mile runs, the action-oriented Hake from under the wire—that Hake was a different person. That Hake wanted a different solution, and there was no one in sight.

He dumped the rest of the coffee, put his clothes on and went out of the room.

The long and silent hall was empty, the ceiling lights economically dimmed down. There was a dank, musty smell that he had not remembered, and a large, semicircular water stain by the Chinese couple's door that he had not noticed before. Rather poor


LIBERTY TOWN.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

management, he thought; would there be anyone in the lobby? Maybe an all-night coffee shop to get something to eat?

The lobby was also dimmed-down and silent, but he managed to wake the desk clerk long enough to get change, and from the automatic vending machines he got candy bars, a Rome *Daily American,* and even an Arabic-language daily published in Naples.

Reminding himself that he was not in Capri for pleasure, he pulled the covers off the bed and spent the next hour reading and eating candy bars, lying on the floor. After an hour or so he made the trip down to the lobby again for some fifty-lire change and ultimately fell asleep, with the light on, on the floor.

At ten the door buzzer woke him.

The room was now intolerably hot, and his bones ached from the floor, but he opened the door. It looked like the girl who had met him at the hoverport, but was not. It was male. "Mario?" he guessed.

The youth smirked. "Yes; of course Mario," he said. "But you did not recognize me as a signorina, did you? We must not often be seen together, you see—Hake! What insanity have you been up to?"

"What? Oh, you mean why the room is this way. Well, we had a power failure. And I nearly froze to death on that bed."

Mario's eyebrows rose. He switched on the air-conditioner and said, "Why did you not use the bed heater? What heater? Oh, Hake, you are such an innocent! Here, this switch on the side. You set it to whatever temperature you would like. Thirty-five if you want it, or even more."

"Oh, hell." Now that it was explained, it was perfectly obvious. He dialed it to forty degrees, promising himself at least a nice warm nap. As he straightened up, Mario was approaching him with what looked like an elaborate silver-filigree bracelet. "Hey, what's that for?"

Mario snapped it on his wrist. "So that you may enjoy that bed with the companion of your choice, or with none at all," he said good-humoredly.

"It's a sexual-preference thing? I've never seen it."

"A local custom," Mario explained. "If you wear this it indicates you do not wish anyone to inaugurate a sexual approach to you. See, I also wear one. Without it on, you would be kept quite busy and it would perhaps interfere with your duties. You will find



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that they are quite scarce on Capri, for after all why else would anyone come here?"

"Well—" said Hake.

"Oh, do not fear, when you are off duty you may remove it! Now, do you wish to shower, or at least dress?"

"I suppose so. Oh, and listen," Hake said, "I haven't been wasting my time. I managed to get a couple of papers last night, and checked all the stories about religion."

"Very commendable, Hake," Mario said, glancing at his watch.

"There wasn't an awful lot, but there was one stroke of luck. I found an editorial in something called, what is it, *Corriere Islamica di Napoli* about an interesting youth cult. There's this fellow in Taormina—"

"That is splendid, Hake, but please, your shower. We must hurry. Of course you will want a coffee? Then you can tell me all about it. But the taxi is waiting, and my expense account—well, you know what it is like with one's expenses!"

Actually Hake did not know. He had never had an expense account from the Agency. But if what Mario had meant to imply was that his expenses would be scrutinized, it seemed to Hake strange that they should take a taxi all the way to Anacapri to sit and drink morning coffee in an open-air restaurant exactly like twenty-five others they had passed on the way; and then to take another taxi all the way back to a restaurant that turned out to be a block from Hake's hotel, for the lunch Mario insisted he had to have at the stroke of twelve. It seemed to Hake that Mario was not a very efficient secret agent. In fact, flakey. The Mario of Munich and the rest of the flu-spreading trip had been subdued and deferential; this one was more like a plumbing salesman on a tour.

And when the lunch came Mario picked at it. He was obviously much more interested in the nearly nude dancers in the floorshow than in eating. He divided his time between staring at them as they whipped off their peasant skirts to reveal nothing much beneath, and nudging Hake and peering at his face excitedly. Hake felt distinctly uncomfortable. Mario had been much the same on the patio at Anacapri, where bar girls in bikinis had served them their capuccinos. In neither place did he seem very interested in the Islamic youth cult Hake had boned up on out of the Arab-language newspaper and a few discreet questions of the Lebanese night porter at the hotel.

It all seemed like an awful waste of time to Hake, and it did


LICENSED TO WWW.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not get better. After the lunch Mario had barely picked at, he said, "Well, perhaps it would be as well for you to rest this afternoon. I will meet you for dinner. And then we will plan our activities for tomorrow."

"What activities? Look, Mario, I came here on a specific mission, and Curmudgeon said it was of the highest priority."

"Ah, Curmudgeon," said Mario, shrugging easily. He took a nail-clipper from his pocket, signaled for the check and began manicuring his already perfect nails. "At headquarters what do they know of us in the field, eh? You are doing very well, Hake. There is no need to try to impress the home office with your diligence. In our work it is always essential to move with precise knowledge, according to a plan. Speed? Yes, sometimes. But caution and precision, always."

"But—"

"Hush!" Mario gestured at the waiter, coming to bear away check and credit card. "Have the goodness to postpone this conversation to a more opportune time," he said coldly. Then he dropped his napkin—on purpose, as it appeared to Hake—and bent down to retrieve it. There was a quiet but definite sputtering sound from under the table. The lights went out, and Mario sat up, rubbing his fingers.

Hake stared. "Mario! What the hell did you do?"

"I warn you again, Hake, not here! Have they taught you nothing in Texas?" Mario whispered furiously. They sat in angry silence until the waiter returned, carrying check and card, his expression embarrassed. Hake could not understand a word of the Italian, but the sense was clear enough. Due to this wholly unforeseeable interruption to the electricity, the computer was unable to process the credit card.

Mario held his hand up forgivingly. *"Capisco,"* he said. *"Fa niente. Ecco—due cento, tre cento, tre cento cinquanta, e basta. Ciao."*

*"Grazie, tante grazie, arrivederla,"* said the waiter, clutching the wad of lire gratefully.

And walking along the crowded street, on the short block back to the hotel, Mario said, "Yes, of course it was I. Why do you think I selected that table? There was an electric outlet beneath it for the cleaning. Have you not been taught, it is the little things that add up?"

"And last night in the hotel. Did you do that, too?"

"Of course I did, Hake. Both the electricity and the flooding. I


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wedged the lock in that room door, and when I left you I turned on their taps, just a trickle, with a washcloth stuffed in the drain. Were you not taught such things?"

"Christ, no." Hake thought silently for a moment. At the steps to the hotel he said, "You know, all that seems pretty chicken-shit to me. You're just annoying people. You're not doing any real damage."

"I see! And that is not worthy of your efforts, Master American Spy? What a pity! But it is exactly this that we must do, on a small scale or large! The lit match in the mailbox. The phone off the hook. The emergency cord pulled in a tram at the rush hour. Each is tiny, but together they are great!"

"But I don't see—"

"But, but, but," said Mario, "always there is a 'but'! I have no time to explain these simple things to you, Hake. I have much to do. Go inside. Swim in the pool, meet some signorinas—you may take off your bracelet, and then you will see! And I will meet you tonight for dinner—and," he twinkled, "perhaps I will have a surprise for you! Now go, I do not wish to be seen too often in your hotel."

But when they met, Mario's mood had changed again. He drove the three-wheeled Fiat-Idro vengefully across Capri's narrow roads. After ten minutes of it, Hake asked, "Are you going to tell me what you're angry about?"

"Angry? I am not angry!" Mario snapped over the noise of the wind. And then, relenting, "Well, perhaps I am. I have had sad news. Dieter is in jail."

"That's too bad," Hake said, although in his heart he was not moved. "What's he in for?"

"For the usual thing, of course! For doing his job."

He drove in silence for some minutes, and then, surprisingly, his face cleared. Hake stared around to see why. They were passing through an olive grove, where crews of Ethiopian laborers were cutting down trees, stacking them and burning them. The smoke drifted unpleasantly across the road. It was a hot evening anyway; the wisps of steam from the Fiat's exhaust vanished almost at once into the air, and the laborers were glistening with sweat. But Mario seemed pleased. "At least some things go well," he said obscurely. "Now observe, we are almost there."

Their destination turned out to be an open-air *trattoria* on the brink of a precipice. They drove under a vine-covered arch, atop it


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a bright liquid-crystal sign that showed what looked like an ancient Roman peasant being shampooed with a huge fish. The name of the place was *Il morte di pescadore*. Mario tossed the Fiat's keys to a parking attendant, and led the way between tables and waiters to a banquette overlooking the cliff.

And there, beaming at them, was Yosper.

"Well, Hake!" he said, rising to shake hands from the meal he had not waited to start, "so we meet again! Are you surprised?"

Hake sat down and spread his napkin on his lap before he answered. When he had seen Yosper last it had been in Munich, along with Mario and Dieter and the other two young thugs who had accompanied him; and none of them had responded by word or hint to any of his overtures about the Agency.

"Not really," he said at last.

"Of course you weren't," Yosper agreed heartily. "I knew you understood we were part of the gang in Germany."

"Then why didn't you say something?"

"Oh, come on, Hake! Didn't they teach you anything in Texas? All information is on a need-to-know basis, that's doctrine. There was no need for you to know; you were doing fine without it. And declassifying is *always* contraindicated when it might jeopardize a mission. Which it could have; who knew what you might take it into your head to do? The whole point of what you were doing was that you were a simple man of God, doing the Lord's work in Europe. What better cover could you have than to believe in yourself?" He raised a hand to forestall Hake. "And then, of course," he said, "that was just your first training mission. We all do a blind one first. That's doctrine, too. Can't expect special treatment, can you, Horny?"

"Can Dieter expect special treatment?" Mario put in sullenly.

"Oh, Mario, please. You know that Dieter will be taken care of. A few days, a week or two at the most—we'll have him out of there. Don't we always?"

"We don't always get put in a Neapolitan jail," Mario said sulkily.

"*That's enough.*" There was a distinct silence, and then Yosper went on sunnily, "Now, as I'm well ahead of you, why don't you both order? There's excellent seafood here. Though not, of course, local."

After a moment, Mario began ordering methodically from the most expensive items on the menu. He did not meet Yosper's eyes, but the old man was only looking amused. Hake settled for a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*fritto-misto* and a salad, unwilling to load his stomach in the heat. When the waiter had gone, he said, "Is it all right to talk here?"

"We have been, haven't we? Don't worry. Mario will let us know if anyone is pointing a microphone at us."

"Then let me tell you what I've done about our project. I told Mario that last night I found some interesting leads in the newspapers. This afternoon I went to the American Library and did a little research. There's useful stuff. The most interesting is a new Islamic cult that preaches a return to purity, no intercourse with infidels, four wives to a man, instant divorce—for men, of course—and all the rest. Just like Mahmoud himself. It's not here on Capri. It's mostly in a place called Taormina, wherever that is, but there's also a center in a town named Benevento. According to the map, that's up in the hills, not very far from Naples."

Yosper nodded judiciously, mopping up his *salsa verde* with a chunk of bread. "Yes, that sounds promising," he conceded.

"It sounds like just what I'm supposed to be looking for!" Hake corrected. "Or almost. I'm not sure that Curmudgeon wanted me to get involved with Islam. I got the impression that he was thinking more of some fundamentalist Christian sort of sect—What's the matter?"

Yosper had put down his bread and was scowling fiercely. "I don't want to hear blasphemy," he snapped.

"What blasphemy? It's the operation I'm assigned to, Yosper. My orders are—"

"Fuck your orders, Hake! You are not going to despoil the word of God. Stay with your Mohammedans, who the hell cares about their false idols? Don't mess with our sweet Redeemer!"

"Now, wait a minute, Yosper. What do you think I'm doing here?"

"Following orders!"

"Whose orders?" Hake demanded hotly. "Yours? Curmudgeon's? Or am I supposed to make up my own little trick-or-treat pranks like Mario, blowing fuses and setting fire to mailboxes?"

"You are supposed to do what you're told to do by the officer in charge, which in this case is me."

"But this mission—" Hake stopped himself as the waiter approached, wheeling a table with a solid-alcohol lamp under a huge chrome bowl. By the time the waiter and the maitre-d' had finished collaborating on Mario's fettucini Alfredo, Hake had a grip on himself.

"All right," he said. "How about this: suppose I found some



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Christian revivalist to preach abstinence, to cut the population down? I know it would be slow, but—"

Mario chuckled. "In *Italy*?"

"Yes, in Italy. Or anywhere. Perhaps it shouldn't be abstinence but birth-control, or even homosexuality—"

Mario was no longer laughing. "That's not funny."

"I don't mean it to be funny!"

"Then," said Mario, "it's funny. Grotesque, even. Not the homosexuality, but your bigoted, out-of-date attitude toward male love." He had stopped eating, and the look on his face was hostile.

Yosper intervened. "You two quit fighting," he ordered. "Eat your dinner." And after a moment he began a conversation with Mario in Italian.

Hake ate in silence, averting his eyes from both of his table companions. They did not seem to mind. Their conversation appeared to be about the food, the wine, the models who moved around the restaurant displaying furs, jewels and bathing suits—about anything and everything that didn't include Hake. It was a lot like it had been in Germany, and Hake was beginning to have a bad feeling. What was going on? Once again, the situation did not add up. The mission that had been top-priority urgent in Texas did not seem to matter at all on Capri: What was he carrying this time?

For that matter, what was he doing in Italy at all? He did not fit in to this expensive restaurant filled with the idle rich, or the rich corrupt: ex-oil sheiks in burnooses, black American dope kings, Calcutta slumlords and Eastern European film stars. Hake had not realized there was so much money in the world. Mario's fettucini cost as much as a week's shopping at the A&P in Long Branch, and the bottle of Chateau Lafitte he was washing it down with would have made a sizeable down payment on repainting the parsonage porch. Not just the money. Energy! He had become calloused to power-piggery, with all the jet fuel he had burned for the Agency, but this! The illuminated sign outside the restaurant alone would have kept his heater going for weeks. And it was not even in good taste. The liquid crystal display showed a man in Roman peasant costume either trying to snap at a huge fish or trying to avoid it: the fish moved in toward his face, the man's head bobbed away, and back and forth again.

Yosper leaned over and said, "Got over your bad mood?" He didn't wait for an answer. "There's a story behind that sign, you know."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I was sure there would be;" Hake said.

"Oh, come off it, will you? We've got to work together. Let's make it easy on ourselves."

Hake shrugged. "What's the story?"

"Um. Well, one of the Roman emperors used to live around here, and he took walks along this cliff. One day a fisherman climbed up from the beach to make his emperor a present of a fish he had just caught. It didn't work out very well. The emperor was pissed off at being startled, so he ordered his guard to rub the fish in the man's face."

"He sounds like a mean son of a bitch," Hake observed.

"That's about the nicest thing you could say about him, actually. That was Tiberius. He's the one who crucified our Lord, or anyway appointed Pontius Pilate. There's more to it. The fisherman wasn't real smart, and when the guard let him up he wised off. He said, 'Well, I'm glad I tried to give the fish to you instead of the other thing I caught.' 'Let's see the other thing he caught,' Tiberius said, and the guard opened up the bag, and it was a giant crab. So Tiberius had the guard give him a massage with *that*, and the fisherman died of it."

"Nice place," Hake said.

"It has its points," said Yosper, eyeing two models displaying lingerie. "I hope you've been paying attention to them. Well! How about a sweet? They do a beautiful crepe suzette here."

"Why not?" said Hake. But that wasn't the real question; the question was *why?* And how? What was the purpose of this silly charade, and where did the money come from? Especially bearing in mind Mario's remarks about his expense account, what could possibly justify the tab they were running up in this place?

And continued to run up—until the night ran out, it began to appear. Neither Yosper nor Mario seemed in the least interested in leaving. Finishing the crepes, Mario proposed brandies all around; after the brandies, Yosper insisted on a lemon ice "to clear the palate." And then they settled down to some serious drinking.

Toward midnight their waiters went off duty and were replaced by bar girls, a different one with every round and all pretty, and there had been a sort of floor show. The comedians had been pretty much a waste of time, being obliged to operate in half a dozen languages, but the strip-teasers were handsome women, a regular United Nations of them in a variety of colors and genotypes, and so were the models, hostesses, and hookers who continued to stroll


LIBERTYTOWN.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through the room. Hake provisionally decided that his guess about Mario's inclinations had been wrong, judging by the way his attention came to a focus every time a new girl came near, but he was losing interest. He wasn't just sick of being in this restaurant, he was pretty sick of Mario, too. The youth felt obliged to point out each celebrity and notoriety he recognized: "That's the girl who played Juliet at the Stratford festival last year. There's Muqtab al'Horash; his father owned thirty-three oil leases. He comes here to buy things for his harem off the models. Now and then he buys a model. There's the president of the French Chamber of Deputies—" Apart from increasingly frequent trips to the men's room, Hake felt condemned to spend his life in this gaudy, raucous room that he was sick of, with Mario, whom he was sick of, and especially with Yosper, of whom he was sickest of all. The man just did not stop talking. And he was not your common garden variety of bore, who will keep on regardless of blank expression or eyes darting this way and that, seeking escape; Yosper wanted full attention, and enforced it. "What's the matter, Hake? Falling asleep? I was telling you that this is *Italy*. The national motto is *Niente e possibile, ma potiamo tutto*. Everything's illegal, but if you have the money you can do what you like. 'S good duty, right, Mario? And heaven knows we're entitled—"

But to what? To this endless ordeal of squirming in a shag velour armchair, while beautiful women kept bringing drinks he didn't want? Hake had the Munich feeling, the conviction that a script was being played out that he had had no part in writing, and in which he did not know his lines. In Germany the feeling had been uncertain and only occasional—until that girl, what's her name, Leota, had turned up and made it all concrete. Here it was real enough, but he did not understand what was going on.

Yosper was back on the subject of the emperor Tiberius, and growing argumentative. It was not the drink. He had been drinking three Perrier waters for each brandy, Hake had observed, but he was warming to his subject. Or subjects. All of them. "Come right down to it," he declaimed, "old Tiberius was right about the fisherman. Asshole had no business coming into a restricted area, right? You can't exercise power without discipline. Can't enforce discipline without a little, what you might call, cruelty. Study history! Especially around here, where it all happened. When the Christians and the Turks fought over this part of the world they didn't fool around with compassion. Turk caught a Christian, like


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enough they'd stick him ass-down on a sharpened stake by the helm, to keep the steersman company. Christians caught a Turk, same thing. And you know, those poor impaled buggers used to laugh and joke with the helmsmen while they were dying! Now, that's what I call good morale."

Mario staggered to his feet. "Excuse me," he said, heading for the men's room. Yosper laughed.

"Good kid," he said, "but he has a little trouble confronting reality now and then. Symptom of the times: we all get taught that it's bad to hurt anybody, not to mention kill them. 'S what's wrong with the world today, you want my opinion."

"What's wrong with the world *tonight,*" Hake said recklessly, "is I'm really tired of this place. Can't we go?"

Yosper nodded approvingly and signaled for another round. "You're impatient," he said. "That's the same as eager, and that's a good thing. But you have got to learn, Hake, that sometimes the best thing you can do is just sit and wait. There's always a reason, you know. Maybe we don't know it, but it's there."

"Are you talking about God or Curmudgeon?"

"Both, Hake. More than that. I'm talking about duty. My family's duty-oriented. It's what I'm proudest of. We paid our bills. My Dad, he was gassed at Verdun, did you know that? Burned him right out. Took him twelve years of trying to knock Mom up after that, so I could be born, but he made it. I'm right proud of Dad. No, listen to me, Hake, what I'm saying's important. It's *duty*. That means you have to pay your dues on demand. Maybe it's a Roman short-sword in the guts, or an English cloth-yard arrow at Crecy. Molten lead. Pungee pits. Flame throwers—you'd be amazed how much fat'll come out of a human body. Why, when they opened the shelters in Dresden after the firestorm, there was an inch of tallow on the floor all around."

"Or maybe," snarled Hake, "it's just sitting in a gin-mill on the Isle of Capri, listening to somebody trying to turn your stomach."

Yosper grinned approvingly. "You've got it, Hake. Duty. You do what you're told."

He held up, while the cocktail waitress brought them their new drinks. Behind her was another girl, slim and tanned, wearing an assortment of mood jewelry and not much else. "Speak English?" she inquired. When Yosper nodded she handed them each a card, then gracefully displayed rings, pendants, brooches and bracelets before leaving with a smile and a trail of perfume.

" 'Spalducci's Botheca,' " Yosper read from the card. "Works of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the devil, those places, but I have to admit that girl herself certainly has the look of something from a better Maker. Oh, I'm not one of your religious bigots, Hake, I can understand temptation for the sins of the flesh. Didn't our Lord Himself stand on that mountain, while the Devil offered Him all the treasures of the earth? And He was tempted. And—"

His voice stopped. He sat up straight, peering across the tables. Mario was hurrying toward them, buttoning and zipping as he came, his face agitated. As soon as he was in earshot he called something in Italian, tapping his silver bracelet; Yosper asked a sharp question in the same language, and the two of them sped for the doors.

Hake sat there, watching them go. When they were out of sight he turned the card over. There was a message penciled on the back:

Meet me
Blue Grotto
0800 tomorrow.

It was no more than he had expected when he saw that the model had been the girl from Munich, Leota.

It had been 3:00 AM before he got back to his hotel, Yosper and Mario sitting grim-faced and silent next to him, refusing to answer questions, curtly ordering him to stay put until called for. He didn't need answers, or at least not from them.

And he did not stay put. He set his alarm and by six was on his way down to the waterfront.

The only words Hake had to discuss his intentions were "Blue Grotto" and *quanta costa*. They would have to serve. There was no difficulty finding the right quayside. All quaysides were right. Wherever he looked there were signs in every language, urging tourists to the Blue Grotto. The difficulties were the weather, which was wet and gray, and the time of day, which was a lot too early for your average Capri boatman to be ready for a customer. The big party boats inshore were still under canvas, and deserted. Farther out on the catwalk were a cluster of smaller ones, propelled by the stored kinetic energy of flywheels; a few of them had people working around them, but none seemed up to speed. If the *signore* would wait just an hour, perhaps at most two . . . If the *signore* could only defer his desires until the time when the tour buses began to arrive. . . . But Hake did not dare wait. If Leota wanted to see him in private, she would be gone by the time the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traffic grew heavy.

It took time and patience. But Sergio suggested Emmanuelle, who thought Francesco could help, who directed Hake to Luigi, and at the end of the list Ugo had just unclutched his flywheel. They were off.

The diamond-shaped craft whirred down the coastline, with surf pounding the base of the cliffs a few hundred yards to their left. The flat flywheel amidships was not merely the power source for the screw. It served as a sort of gyroscope as well, leveling out some of the rock and pitch of the waves. That was not altogether a good thing, as Hake perceived as soon as the first chops began to splash over the coaming. By the time they turned in toward the steep cliffs around the Grotto, he was drenched with salt water and a fairly high proportion of floating oil slicks.

Ugo explained, by signs and gestures, that as the only entrance was by sea they would now moor the power vessel to a buoy and transfer to the rubber raft they had been towing behind. "No, Ugo, not so fast," said Hake, and began signs and gestures of his own.

When the boatman realized what Hake wanted, he exploded into Neapolitan fury. Hake did not need to understand a word of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Italian to comprehend both the premises and the conclusion of his syllogism perfectly. Major premise, timing the waves and judging the currents at the cave entrance required every bit of the skill and training of a master boatman, such as himself. Minor premise, the *turista* clearly didn't have the skill to navigate soap out of a bathtub. Conclusion, the best that could come of this mad proposal was that he would lose fee, tip, and an extremely valuable rubber boat. The worst was that he would be sentenced for cold-blooded murder. And the whole thing was out of the question. But money talked. Hake arranged with the boatman to come back in an hour and entered the rubber boat.

The raft had no draft, and thus no consistency of purpose. Hake had no skill, and so entering the cave became a matter of brute force and persistence. On a negligible ledge near the cave two slim young men were sunning their already dark bodies, and Hake's flounderings took place under their amused and interested eyes. A powerful little hydrogen-outboard was bumping against its moorings just below them. Hake wished he could borrow the boat, but saw no way to accomplish it. In any event, he was committed. The rock ledges of the low cave entrance looked seriously sharp. Avoiding puncture, Hake almost lost an oar. Reclaiming the oar, he misjudged a wave and crunched the side of his skull against the low roof of the cave. But then he was through . . . and suspended in space.

From the outside the Grotto had looked neither blue nor inviting, but inside it was incredible. The sun that beat through the tiny entrance came in by a submarine route. By the time it illuminated the interior of the cave all of the warm frequencies had been trapped underwater, and what glowed inside the Grotto was pure cerulean. More. The light was all below the surface. Oil slicks marked the interface between air and water, but where there was no oil there seemed to be nothing below the level of Hake's boat: he was floating in blue space, topsy-turvy, disoriented—and enchanted.

He was also alone.

That was not a surprise in itself; it was far too early for the tour boats. But it was already past eight o'clock. Finding the boat and arguing with its owner had taken longer than it should, and where was Leota?

A string of bubbles coming in from the cave mouth answered him. Under them was a wavery pale shape that could have been a large fish, began to resemble a mermaid and then became Leota,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

air tanks strapped to her back and breathing gear over her face. She moved upward through the bright water and surfaced a few yards away. She pulled the face mask off and hung there for a moment, regarding him, then swam to clutch the end of the raft. "Hello, Hake," she panted, her voice tiny in the huge wet space.

Hake looked down at her, almost embarrassed. Apart from the straps for the air tanks, the girl was wearing very little—*la minima,* it was called—a brightly colored triangular scrap of cloth below her navel, held by thin cords, and nothing above. "Get in, for God's sake," he said.

"I'll get you all wet and oily."

"Get in, get in!" He leaned to starboard while she climbed in from port, and they managed to get her aboard without tipping over. They regarded each other silently for a moment before he demanded, "What are you doing in Italy?"

She threw her hair back and wiped oil off her face. "Better things than you are, at least. I never thought you'd get into drugs."

"*Drugs*?" But even as he spoke he knew he did not doubt her.

"That's right, Hake. That's what your bunch is up to. I'm willing to believe," she conceded, "that you didn't know it, because I don't think it's your style at all. But there it is." She turned to study the empty cave entrance for a moment. "I have ten minutes, no more," she added. "Then you stay here for a while and I'll go. Don't try to follow me, Hake. I have friends—"

"Oh, for God's sake. Look, first things first. Are you sure about the drugs?"

"Bloody damn sure," she said. "The Italian cops put one of your boys away for it yesterday. Stopped him in that galleria in Naples, with a satchel full of Xeroxed directions for making angel dust."

"I never heard of angel dust!"

"What they call pay-chay-pay. PCP. It's an old drug, comes back every twenty years or so—when a new generation comes along that doesn't know what it can do to you. One or two shots can screw up your head forever. Thing is, it's the easiest thing in the world to make. Any high-school kid can put it together in Mom's kitchen if he has the directions. Your boy was selling the recipe to all the *ragazzi* in Naples—until one of them finked to the fuzz."

They were drifting close to the wall of the cave. Awkwardly Hake sculled them a few yards farther away, while Leota watched with amusement. He said doggedly, "I don't want to call you a


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liar, but I didn't think the, uh, the group I'm involved with would do anything like that. How do you know this kid worked for us?"

"Oh, I know. Who do you think alerted the Italian narcs to plant the kid in the galleria? You want the details?" She leaned back against her air tanks and recited: "Dietrich Nederkoorn, comes from a little fishing village in Holland, deserted the Dutch Army three years ago, worked for your boys ever since at one crummy thing or another. About twenty-five. Gay. Beatle haircut. Blue eyes, black hair, freckles, medium height."

"Yeah," Hake said slowly. "I saw him in Germany. But why would we do a thing like that?"

"What I've been asking you all along, Hake. I don't mean why they would. I mean why you would. For the gorillas you work for, sure, it's tailor-made. Very cost-effective. It's like a bite of the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Once you get it started, it runs itself. By now there must be a million of those circulars in Italy. If Nederkoorn weren't such an asshole he wouldn't be in the slammer now. The process was already on the way. There's no way in the world the Italian narcs, or anybody else, can catch up with all those leaflets and all the copies that are being made. So there goes a whole generation of Italian kids. Thousands of them, maybe millions, are going to be showing up for work stoned out of their heads from something they scored two weeks back—if they show up at all. It's a big success, Hake. The government's got an all-out drive against it right now, school assembly programs, TV commercials, rock stars traveling the country to campaign against it—for all the good that's going to do," she said bitterly. "What kind of human being does a thing like that?"

"I wish I could tell you," Hake said unhappily. Well, part of it he could have told her. The obsession that caused Mario and the others to practice their petty harassments with fuse-blowers and tiny floods was enough to explain Dieter's being unable to stop. But— "But I don't know what I'm doing in this," he said. "All I've done is sit around."

She stared at him. "You didn't know? Oh, Christ, Hake. They brought you over here to finger me."

"I never said a word!"

"No, Hake," she said, with no anger in her tone, "I'm sure you didn't. I wouldn't be here if I weren't. You're dumb, yes. But not treacherous. You didn't have to. Your tickle-taster took care of it for you."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What the hell's a tickle-taster?"

"You're wearing it right now, Hake." She pointed to his silver wristlet. "Works sort of like a polygraph. All they had to do was wait until you went *boing* on the taster, and then see who caused it. Which was me. I knew they were close. They could figure I had to be working at one of three or four places on Capri, and all they had to do was plant you in them until I turned up. Oh, Hake," she said, actually smiling, "don't look so *guilty*! They would've got to me sooner or later."

Hake stared at the judas on his arm, shining cold blue in the diffuse light. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Yeah. Well. Listen, there's not much they can do to me. I'm on Italian territory. I haven't done anything against the law here, or anyway not very much. Besides, I helped them find Nederkoorn.

Hake said, "I think the way I was looking wasn't so much guilty as just plain foolish. What will you do now?"

Her expression became opaque. "That much I don't trust you, Hake." And then she added, "Actually, there's not much I can do. I'm blown, for here and now. I'll move to another place. There are others who will stay and carry on—" She hesitated, glanced at her watch, and then said more rapidly, "And that's what I wanted to see you for. Will you join up?"

"Join what?"

"Join on the side of the good guys! What the hell do you think? You can make up for a lot of crumminess if you've got the nerve to take a stand now."

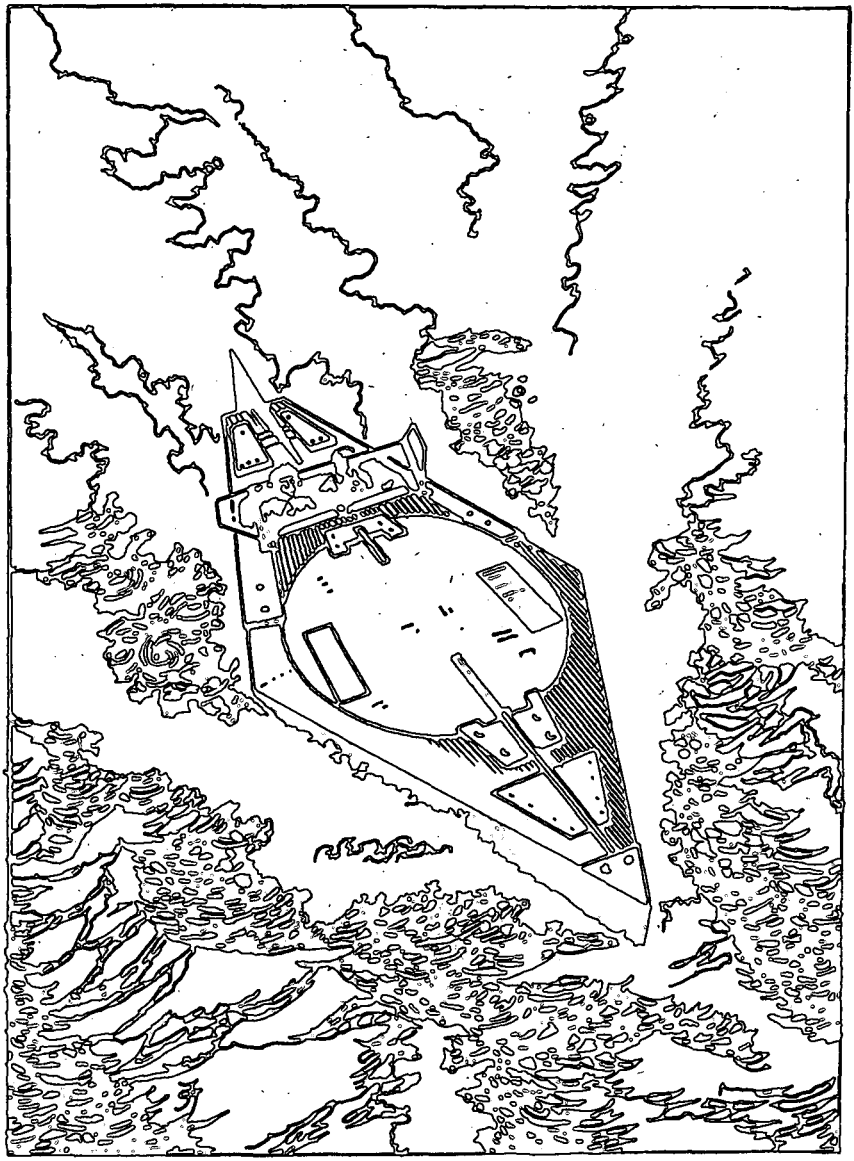
Hake brought his open palm down flat on the water, splashing the girl and startling her. He said furiously, "God *damn* it, Leota! How do I know your stupid games are any better than theirs? This whole situation is *sick*."

"Then don't make it sicker! Come on, Hake. I don't expect you to fall into my arms now. I just want you to think about it. I've got to go, but I'll give you time—overnight. I'll call you at your hotel tomorrow morning. Early. I'm sure they're bugging your wire, so I won't say anything. You speak. Just say hello. Say it once for yes, twice for no—three times for maybe. Which," she added irritably, "is about what I'd expect from you. Then I'll get in touch, never mind how. And Hake. Don't try setting any traps or anything. I'm not alone, and the other people on my side right now play rougher than I do."

She picked up her face mask, but paused before putting it on.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Unless you'd care to say yes right now?" she inquired.

He didn't answer, because there was a sound like a tiny rapid-fire cap pistol from the mouth of the cave. They both turned. The little hydrogenpowered outboard came bouncing through the opening and then arrowed straight toward them, looking as though it were suspended in blue space.

Hake grabbed an oar. He didn't know the two men coming toward them, but it was a good bet that they worked for Yosper. "Get out of here, Leota!" he cried. "I'll see if I can keep them busy—"

But she was shaking her head. "Oh, Hake," she said sorrowfully, "no, they're not yours. They're a lot worse than that."

Hake held the oar before him like a quarter-staff, but it was apparent that it would not be much use. The two men were not very big, and certainly not formidably dressed. Like Leota, they wore *i minimi.* But unlike Leota, they carried guns. The one at the motor had a pistol, the other what looked like a rapid-fire carbine, pointed directly at Hake. It was now obvious that they were the two who had been lounging on the ledge outside; more than that, they had a somewhat familiar look—like someone he had seen somewhere before, and a lot like each other.

"Put your oar down, Horny," Leota said. "I didn't mean for this to happen, at all."

The two men did not only resemble each other, they were almost identical. They had to be twins: tiny dark bodies, no more than five feet three, long straight black hair, black eyes. From under the tarpaulins, Hake could see them sitting in the bucket seats on either side of the chattering outboard, Leota draped across the coaming on one side of them. Two well-to-do Eastern gentlemen enjoying the Mediterranean with a pretty girl: there was nothing in that spectacle to attract anyone's attention. He could hear the first of the party boats arriving with its tandem flywheels whining away, but one of the men had his foot on Hake's neck. "Easy, cock," he said, grinning conventionally. "Don't try to sit up. You'd just get all those nice people killed."

"Do what they say, Horny," said Leota. Hake didn't answer. With a foot on his windpipe he couldn't. And what was there to say?

They bounced over the gentle swell for twenty minutes or more. Then the machine-gun sound of the motor slowed, one of the men wrapped a cloth around Hake's eyes, he was kicked in the small



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the back, the tarps were dragged off him and he was prodded up a rope ladder. "Stay on deck, sweetie," said one of the men in his high, accentless voice—to Leota, Hake assumed. Then one on each side of him they shoved him through a door and down a steep companionway. He heard a door close behind them, and one of the men said: "You can take the blindfold off now. And sit down."

Hake unwrapped the rag from his face and blinked at them. He was in a low-ceilinged room, bunk beds at either end and a padded locker along the wall, under a porthole covered with a locked metal hatch. There was barely room for all three of them at once. He sat on the locker less because he had been told to than because it was the best way he had of establishing distance between them. But one of them pulled camp chairs from under a bunk, and they drew them up one on each side, facing him.

Then he remembered where he had seen them, or one of them, before. "Munich! When I was sick. I thought you were a doctor."

"Yes, Hake, that was me. I am Subirama Reddi," said the one on the left, "and this is my brother Rama. You can tell which is which because I am left-handed and my brother right. We find this useful. Also Rama has a scar over his eye, do you see? He got that from an American in Peiping, and it makes him mean."

"Oh, no, not mean!" said Rama, shaking his head. "We will get along very well, Hake, provided that you do exactly as we say. Otherwise—" He shrugged, with an expression that was somewhere between a smile and a pout. They had perfect English, colloquial and quick if sometimes odd. It was not quite true that they had no accents; the accents were there, but not identifiable. To Hake, they sounded vaguely British, but he thought that to a Brit they would have seemed American—as though they had come from somewhere along the mid-Atlantic ridge, or perhaps from Yale. Their voices were as high and pure as lead tenors in a boy's choir, though what they said was not childish. "What you must do," Rama Reddi went on, "is to tell us completely and quickly all of the names of the agents you have worked with, and what you know of the operations of your agency."

This was not going to be a pleasant time, Hake realized. And it was all foolish, because he knew so little! He turned to Rama and began, "There isn't much I can tell—" The next word was jolted out of his mouth as Subirama's fist hit his ear. Hake turned toward him in rage, and Rama's fist clubbed him on the other side. It was now clear why their opposing handedness was useful.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Subirama moved his chair back a few inches, and switched the gun he had been holding in his free hand to his good one. He spoke rapidly to his brother, who nodded and produced a rope. While Rama Reddi was tying Hake's hands, Subirama said, "You Americans are very confident of your size and strength. I do not, actually, think you could prevail against either one of us in bare-hand combat, much less two. But I think that you might attempt something which would make it necessary for us to kill you. So we will remove temptation." He waited until his brother had finished with Hake's hands, and then drove his fist into Hake's stomach. "Now," he said conversationally, "we will start with the names of the persons you have contacted in Italy so far."

Before they were through Hake had told them everything they asked for. He did not try to resist, after the first few minutes. As long as they confined themselves to beating him he might survive, and even recover; but they made it clear that if he held out it would cost him his fingernails, his eyes and his life, in that order. He gave them names he didn't know he remembered. All four of Yosper's helpers. Every member of his class under the wire. He even gave a physical description of the woman who had led him to his first interview at lo-Wate Bottling Co. and the sheep-herder who had driven him to the airport bus. He could not tell which parts interested them. When some name or event led them to demand more information, he did not see why. Why would they care about a Hilo avocado-grower's wife? But they questioned him endlessly about Beth Hwa. He told them what he knew, everything he knew, some of it four and five times. Then they let him rest. Hake didn't think they were being considerate. He thought their fists were sore.

He would have resisted more, he told himself, if he had had anything to resist for. But the talk with Leota had shaken him again: What was he doing working for the Agency in the first place? Why had he left a perfectly comfortable, personally rewarding and socially useful life as a minister in New Jersey to involve himself in these desperate adolescent games? He climbed into one of the bunks, hungry, exhausted, feeling sick and in pain. He could not believe sleep would be possible, his head pounded so. Then he woke up with Leota sitting on the bunk beside him and realized he had been asleep after all.

"These are aspirins, take them," she said.

He pushed her away and himself up, his head thundering le-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thally. "Get lost," he snarled. "This is the bad-cop and good-cop routine, right? I saw it on television."

"Oh, Hake! You are so terribly ignorant. The boys *are* bad, bad enough to kill you, more likely than not. And I'm good. Mostly good," she corrected herself, holding out the pills. She put an arm behind his head while he drank the water to swallow them, and said, "You look like hell."

He didn't answer. He sat on the edge of the bunk for a moment, then tottered to the tiny toilet and closed the door behind him. In the mirror he looked even worse than he felt. His face was puffed out from chin to hairline; his eyes were swollen half shut, and his ears rang. He splashed cold water on it, but when he tried drying his face with a scrap of towel it hurt. He moved his lips and cheek muscles experimentally. He could talk, and maybe even chew; but it was going to be some time before he could enjoy it.

When he came out Leota was gone, but reappeared in a moment with a tray. She closed the door behind her, and Hake heard someone outside lock it. "Your friends are taking good care of me," he said bitterly.

"Oh, Hake! They aren't friends of mine. I told you I didn't mean for this to happen." She put the tray down and sat next to him. "I brought you some soup. After you eat I've got an ice bag for your face."

He could not bring himself to say thank-you. He grunted instead, and allowed her to feed him a couple of spoonfuls of the thick soup. The rocking of the boat dumped half of each on his lap, and he took the spoon and bowl away from her. The soup was a minestrone, no more than lukewarm but not bad; and he was famished. He emptied the bowl while she talked. "I'm not responsible for the Reddis! Sometimes we work together, sure. But they're mercenaries. They'll kill. They'll do anything they're paid to do. And they scare me."

"What have you paid them to do to me?"

"Not me, Hake! *We* don't pay them. They're working for—" she hesitated, glancing at the door. "Never mind who they're working for," she said, but on her bare thigh, below the short terry-cloth beach robe, her finger traced out the word *Argentina*. "Your own boys have hired them from time to time, I would guess. Right now, somebody else. What does it matter? But when my group needs help, sometimes they give it. If they hadn't taken out your friend Dieter's bodyguard, he never would have been arrested. So with their help we stopped your people from killing kids."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And how did they take out the bodyguard?"

She flinched. "He was a mercenary, too. What does it matter?"

"You say that a lot," he commented. "It matters to me."

"Well, it matters to me, too," she said sadly. "But what's worse, Horny? What kind of people pass out poison dope?"

He took the ice bag from her and gingerly applied it to his jaw. His head was still hammering, but it was a slower, less shattering beat. "Well," he said, "I'll grant you there are faults on both sides. Just for curiosity, what did you *think* was going to happen in the Grotto?"

"I thought I'd try to recruit you to our side," she said simply. "Don't laugh."

"My God, woman! What do you think I've got to laugh at?"

"Well, that's it. I wanted to talk to you. The Reddis were just supposed to stay outside and warn me if your boys came along, or if—excuse me, Horny—if you tried to bring me in, or anything like that."

"Um." Hake transferred the ice bag from right cheek to left thoughtfully. What she said made sense, but did not change the fact that he had spent three hours being beaten and was now held captive, with a future outlook that at best was not to be called promising. "I guess I know what an innocent bystander feels like," he said resentfully.

"*Innocent?*" Leota closed her mouth to cut off the next words, and then, carefully, said, "I wouldn't exactly call you innocent, Horny."

"Well, all right! I made some mistakes."

She shook her head sorrowfully. "You don't really know what's happening, do you? You think all this has happened at random."

"Hasn't it?"

"Random as a guided missile! Your boys go straight for the jugular every time."

"No, that's ridiculous, Leota. I've been with them often enough to know! They're the most bumbling, incompetent—"

"I wish you were right!"

"Really! They picked me out just by chance in the first place. No reason."

"You mean you don't *know* the reason. There was one, believe me. They probably had you under surveillance for months before they pulled you in. Somebody spotted you as a likely prospect—"

"Impossible! Who?"

"I don't know who. But somebody. I know how they work. First



LICENSED TO WIKI.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they pulled your records, then they did a full field check. You must have looked okay, but they had to be sure. So they called you in. You could have told them to get lost—"

"No, I couldn't! I was in the Reserves. They just reactivated me."

"Oh, yes, you could, Horny. You could always have just said no—what would they have done, taken you to court? But you didn't. So you passed the first test, and then they slipped you a few bucks and gave you a dumdum assignment to try you out. Don't look at me like that, Horny, that's what it was. A two-year-old child could have done it, and probably better than you. But you did it, so you passed that test too, and when you found out what it was all about you passed another. You didn't blow the whistle on them."

"I couldn't!"

The girl looked away. "Well, no, you couldn't, Horny, because you probably wouldn't have lived to get to a reporter. Somebody would have seen to that. Whoever fingered you in the first place probably had an eye on you. But, Horny, you didn't know that. You didn't even try; so you passed. Next stage: They send you to training camp. You pass with flying colors. They send you here to fink on me— Don't tell me again you didn't know you were doing it. If you'd thought you could have figured it out. Some kinds of coincidences can't be coincidences. When you saw me you should've got suspicious."

"By then it was too late."

Long pause. "Yeah," she said, and began to cry. "It's a *lot* too late," she managed to say.

It took some time for her meaning to penetrate.

When Leota had left him alone again Hake sat on the edge of the bunk, staring at the red denim coverlet of the upper bunk across the stateroom. He did not see it. His mind and his whole body were in standby mode. It was almost a kind of paralysis. In all the long years in the wheelchair he had never been so little in control of his own fate as he was now.

If indeed he had ever been in command of his fate. Everything Leota had said rang true. He had followed along a course that he could not believe had been of his own choosing. Passive; obedient. Even cooperative: a willing accomplice of people he despised, doing things he loathed. Hake was not sure who he was. The brawler who had exulted in the fight with Tigrito was a person he could not recognize as himself.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was murderously, densely hot in the little stateroom, and with the portholes sealed shut there was no air. At least the pain in his battered head was less. It was even bearable; Leota's aspirins had worked. Or the bruises had dwindled in his consciousness beside the implications of what she had said. Hake let out of his mind the thought that this smelly, steamy room might be the last place he would ever see alive and studied it. It was not frightening, but it was paralyzing. Once again he could see no handle to grip his life by, nothing he could do to change his state.

When Leota had left, responding to three sharp raps on the door, she had gathered up bowl, tray, spoon and even the ice bag to take away. If she had left even so much as a table knife—but there was nothing like that. There was nothing in the room that was not either securely fastened down or harmless.

He wiped sweat from his face, stood up, pulled off his shirt, kicked off his shoes, and was still sweltering. He could not even tell whether it was day or night. The questioning and beating had seemed endless, but might really have been only for an hour or two; the brief sleep could have been minutes, or could have been anything. No light came through the sealed hatch over the portholes. He did not even know whether the little ship was moving or bobbing somewhere at anchor.

He threw his pants across one of the far bunks and stretched out. There was a quality that was almost satisfying about the total impotence of his position. As there was nothing at all he could do, he was permitted to do nothing. Even the pounding faded in his head; the tenderness of his face and the ache in his gut became only phenomena to be observed. He was very nearly at peace as he drowsed there, one arm behind his head, and he was amused to find that his impotence did not extend to all of his person. In all the time he had been talking to Leota one part of him had been very aware of her round, tanned legs and the gentle feminine smell that came from her. He could smell it now; and that, and perhaps the rocking of the boat, and perhaps some unidentified personality trait in the new Hake combined to make him want very much to make love. And when after a time Leota came in again, bearing fresh ice bag, water, and aspirin, and the door was locked behind her and she sat on the edge of the bunk, he reached up toward her. Startled, she said, "Heeeeyyy—" And then, pulling her lips away from his, "At least let me put down the glass." It was like making love in a dream, easy, unhurried and sure, and he was not even surprised to find that she was as


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ready as he.

When they were apart he traced the gentle edge of bone before her left hip with his fingers and said, "You know, I didn't really expect this, but I'm awfully glad about it." Their eyes were only inches apart, and she looked into his carefully, then kissed him, shook her head, sat up and glanced at her watch.

"Take your aspirin," she said, "and then let's talk. I've got twenty-five minutes left to turn you."

"Turn me into what?" he asked, swallowing obediently.

"Turn you into a double agent, Horny," she said.

He slid to the edge of the bunk and sat next to her. He brushed her bare shoulder with his lips thoughtfully. "Oh, yes," he said. "My little problem."

"It's actually our problem, Horny. But that's the deal. If you'll work with them they'll let you go. They've got a plan. They're going to ransom you—exchange you for somebody the Agency's got hidden out in Texas. Don't ask me who; I don't know."

Hake said consideringly, "I don't really know how high a price the Agency puts on me."

She said, "Well, to be frank, Horny, the twins don't really think it's very high. They'll let themselves be bargained down—of course, assuming that you go along. Otherwise there's no deal for you. Or maybe for me, either," she added. "If they, ah, dispose of you I really don't think they will want me to be around as a possible witness to murder."

That was a new thought, and a soberingly unwelcome one to Hake. He put his arm around her warm, damp waist, but she did not yield. "So we have to talk, Horny. I don't think there ought to be any *moral* question for you. I can't believe that you want to be loyal to a bunch of destructive lunatics. It's not just the PCP, or bribing half the disk jockeys in Europe to play narco music, or counterfeiting the pound, or jiggering everybody's computer nets. Or spreading disease, or insect pests, or allergenic weeds, or—"

"I didn't know about the narco music," Hake said. "And what's that about the computers?"

"All the time, Horny. How do you think they finance themselves? Or, for that matter," she added honestly, "how do you think I do? I'm not saying I really like the way my side operates. They spy on you, we spy on you. They trick you, I trick you."

"I like the way you do it better," he observed. "What do you mean, you spy on me? Is that how you knew I was going to the Agency in the first place?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Certainly. We don't have the resources the Agency does," she said bitterly, "but we do what we can. I have an old school friend who—no, never mind who she is. We don't have time. I have to persuade you to turn around."

"Oh," said Hake, "I thought you knew that. I'm turned."

She looked at him. "You're sure?"

"Sure?" He laughed. "What I'm sure of is that I'm getting real tired of being *used*. But I'm willing to try it your way."

She studied him carefully, then shook her head. "All right," she said. "Now all we have to do is hope the Reddis don't change their minds. And—" she glanced at her watch—"we still have twenty minutes."

He pulled her toward him, but he had misunderstood her meaning. She resisted. "Wait a minute, Horny. Now it's time for me to ask you the question."

"What question?"

"The one I told you I was going to ask: Why did you do all this?"

He said peevishly, "I thought we'd just been over all that. *I* don't know."

"But maybe I do. I have a theory. Don't laugh—"

He was a long way from laughing.

"I have to start from the beginning. What do you know about hypnotism?"

Hake took his arm away from her and said, "Leota, I'm not an impatient man, but if you've got a point I wish you'd get to it."

"Well, that is the point. You act hypnotized. Do you understand what I'm saying? Whatever anybody tells you to do, you do. You're suggestible. Just like someone in a hypnotic trance state."

"Oh, shit." He was exasperated. "I can't be *hypnotized* to do things I wouldn't do otherwise—that's a fact! Everybody knows that."

"They do? How do you know it? Have you made a study of hypnotism?"

"No, but—"

"No, but you sure as hell act as though you were! Don't give me knee-jerks, Horny. Think about it."

"Well—" he thought for a moment, and then said cautiously, "I admit that I don't altogether understand what I've been doing the last couple of months. I've wondered about it. I went along with any lousy thing they suggested quick enough—as you point out."

"I don't mean it critically, Horny. The opposite of that. You



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couldn't help yourself, if you were hypnotized."

He looked at her. "How sure are you of any of this?"

"Well, not very," she admitted. "But it makes sense, doesn't it? Is there any other way to explain it? You can't even call it reflex patriotism—you went along with me, too, when I told you not to report me."

He looked up with a spasm of hope. "But—that was *against* the Agency!"

Leota shook her head. "Men! That's a male ego for you. You'd rather believe you were a skunk of your own free will than a helpless dupe. But the fact is, that's a strong sign of the trance state. It's called 'tolerance of incongruities'. It means you act as though mutually conflicting things are both right, or both true."

He protested, "It's all impossible! They couldn't hypnotize me without my remembering it!"

"How do you know that?"

"I don't, but—"

She said, "It could have been a post-hypnotic suggestion to forget. Or you might not have been aware of it in the first place. They could have slipped you a drug. Planted a tape under your pillow. *I* don't know. All I'm sure of—"

She was interrupted by the sound of the door being unlocked. The Reddi with the scar over his brow looked in on them, one hand resting on the holster of a pistol. He smiled.

"Ah, I see you are making good progress, sweetie," he observed as Leota grabbed for her beach dress and held it before her.

She said coldly: "We've made the deal. Now it's up to you to work out an arrangement for a trade."

"I see," he said, studying them in amusement. "Yes, perhaps something can be done. When my brother returns we will speak further. But how can we know that Reverend Hake will keep his word to us?"

Neither Hake nor Leota answered; there was no obvious answer to give. The Indian nodded. "Yes, that is a difficulty. Well. I had thought that you might wish to come on deck, my dear, but perhaps you prefer to remain?"

He smiled—it was almost a friendly smile, at least a tolerant one, Hake was astonished to discover—and closed the door behind him.

Hake and Leota looked at each other. Hake said, "Ah, about what he was saying. How do you suppose they're going to make sure I keep my bargain?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't have a clue, Horny, except that it probably will be in a way you don't like. The easiest thing would be to kill you if you don't. If the Agency can plant somebody who can get at you when they want to, and I can, then it's a real good bet that the Reddis can, too. Or it might be something a lot worse."

"Such as?"

She said angrily, "The worst thing you can think of. Or worse than that, the worst thing either of them can think of. Addict you to a drug? Give you a fatal disease that they keep providing you the medicine for? I don't know. They'll think of something."

The future began to look rather dubious to Hake. "But maybe it won't be that bad," she added, trying to reassure him. "There's nothing you can do about it anyway, right? Whatever it is, it's better than floating up on the docks of the Bay of Naples."

"Why Naples? I thought we were around Capri."

"You'd have to ask them why. Last I saw, we were tied up to some industrial dock near the shipyards. If you listen, you can hear trains in the freightyards."

He listened, putting his arm around her again, but heard nothing he could identify. "Well," he said, "as it looks like we still have some time—"

"Wait a minute, Horny." She was still listening, with an expression of puzzlement. There was a faint, rapid patter of feet on the deck outside, and then something that was almost a splash.

She stood up, pulling the dress over her head. "Something's going on," she announced, and opened the door a crack. There was no one outside. "I'm going to take a look. You'd better stay here."

"No. I'm coming too."

"Then stay back." She crossed to the deck door, which was slid fully open, and looked around. Hake came up behind her and peered over her shoulder. They were moored to ancient wood pilings, alongside a bulkhead. Greasy water lapped against the wood, and beyond the bulkhead were bulbous, immense tanks of some sort. It was nighttime, but the tanks were brightly lit, and around and among them Hake saw figures moving cautiously closer. There was no sign of either of the Reddis.

"Oh, Christ!" she whispered. "It looks like your boys are coming after you. Or, more likely, after the Reddis and me. Rama must've seen them and taken off!"

"What will happen to you?" Hake demanded.

"Nothing real good," she said. "Hake, I'm going to get out of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here. You stay; you'll be okay. If you can, stall them." She ran into the cabin and came out again, strapping the scuba tanks on hurriedly.

"Wait!" he protested. "I want to see you again!"

She paused for a second, regarding him. "Oh, Horny," she said, "you are so bloody *naive*." She kissed him hard and fast, and lowered herself over the far gunwale. Minutes later, when the first of the approaching men had reached the short gangplank, Hake came out of the cabin with his hands up.

"It's me!" he cried. "Thank God you got here! They've all taken off that way, not more than five minutes ago—if you hurry you can catch them!" And he pointed down the waterfront toward the likeliest, darkest spot.

## IV

Yosper was having a high old good time. He took command of the little ship like a corsair, dispatched his pirate crew in all directions, himself straddled the quarter-deck and strutted back and forth. He did not neglect the perquisites of conquest. He found three bottles of Piper-Heidsieck nicely chilled in the cabin aft and shared them with Hake while they supervised the search.

The pursuit on land came up empty. Dietrich, fresh out of a Neapolitan jail, reported that there was no one in sight; he had paid off the hired hoods and sent them away, and the quarry had escaped. I'm glad, Hake thought; one out of three glad, anyway. But Yosper's bright old eyes were on him. "Don't look so happy," he said. "You've got a lot of explaining to do. D'you know what we had to do to get you out of this? First we had to find you. Tracked down the boatman, located a witness in the tour boat outside the Grotto. Then we had to message back to Washington for a spy-satellite photo to identify this ship. Then we had to hire half a dozen musclemen to come in after you."

"I'm sorry to have put you to the trouble."

"Sure you are. Dietz! Go on below and give Mario a hand checking this ship out, then we'll all celebrate."

Hake wasn't listening. He was calculating. The worst thing about owing somebody your life was that it became difficult to be rude to him. But for how long? A week? Well, two or three days, anyway. At a minimum, for longer than would help him now, when he urgently wished for license to tell Yosper to piss off, and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't have it. The man was an arrogant ass, and was repetitively proving it.

"—give it back now."

Hake woke up. "What?"

"I said, you might as well give us back the bracelet now," Yosper repeated, pointing to the silver bangle on Hake's arm. "We won't need it any more on you. Served its purpose. We knew you'd go off to see her, long's we didn't catch her at the *Pescadore*. So we kept you tagged. You didn't move ten feet without registering. But the boat was a surprise, and by the time we could follow, you were out of range."

Silently Hake unstrapped the band and passed it over, as Mario and Dieter came up from the hold. The Italian was carrying a flat metal box, and they were both looking worried. Yosper scrambled to his feet.

"It's defused," said Mario, breathing hard. He handed it to Yosper, who accepted it with care.

"Yeah," he said. "It would have blown this ship up easy enough. And then—" He gazed out at the spherical tanks, only yards away, and Hake was astonished to see that the old man was grinning. "Fifty thousand metric tons of liquid hydrogen!" he breathed. "Man! What a blowup that would've been! You see what kind of people your girl friend's mixed up with, Hake?"

"Smart, though," said Dieter. "It's one of ours."

Yosper frowned, then shook his head. "They're a crafty pair. You're right. If the Eye-ties had found pieces of this, we would've taken the rap, and, man, we all would've been in the soup! They must've got it when they were working on the North Sea job."

Hake sat up. "Hey! Are you saying they worked for *you*?"

"Not any more. They take their work too seriously, Hake. Killing's against our charter," he said virtuously, "except in unusual circumstances. But they *like* it. You're lucky to be alive. If you hire them and don't want killing it costs extra, would you believe it?"

"I don't understand you people," Hake said.

"Because we use mercenaries? Grow up, boy! Don't get means mixed up with ends. We're doing *right*. The Reddis are only tools we use when we have to. You don't ask a gun if it believes in democracy. You just want to know that when you pull the trigger it'll go off." He handed the box back to Mario. "In the old days," he went on severely, forebearingly, "we understood that. I don't blame you for getting mixed up now. How can you give it all



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you've got when you're told we must never drop a bomb or fire a rocket or kneecap an enemy or blow up a bridge? But those are the rules. We don't make them. We just do what we're told—and we use what we have to to do it."

Hake sat back, letting the words wash over him. Yosper's morals were not a concern of his, he told himself. He had other concerns, and he was not in the least sure of how to handle them, or how they were going to come out. He found himself studying Mario and Dieter, who sat in rapt attention to the old man. Precisely as though they hadn't heard all this before, as they surely had; exactly as though it were worth hearing at all. It was very strange that everyone he met, Yosper, Dieter, Mario, Leota, even Jessie Tunman, even the Reddis—as though they were all quite sure of their role in the world and the righteous necessity of getting on with it. While he wasn't sure at all. And Yosper kept right on talking:

"—old days at the United Nations, shee-it! We knew who was who! Knew how to handle them, too. Get a Romanian chargé-d'affaires in bed with a nigger boy and show him the photographs, then he'd come along! Or hook a Russian code clerk on heroin and hold his supply up. World was a lot simpler then, and if you want my opinion, better. We were doing God's work and we knew it. 'Course, we still are, but sometimes—ah, well," he twinkled, "you're getting tired of hearing me, aren't you, boy? And those lumps on your head probably don't feel too good, and you're likely getting hungry. Dietz, you get rid of that thing"—he nodded toward the bomb—"and, Mario, you bring the car around. Champagne's all gone, and it's about time we ate."

The questions in Hake's mind all wanted to be central, and all kept colliding with one another. How seriously, for instance, should he take his deal with the Reddis to "turn"? They hadn't actually released him; he had been rescued. But still they might have their ways to enforce cooperation—and before he had that one even properly sorted out, much less solved, there was another: Had Leota really got safely away, and where was she now? And that was nudged away by, What about the project for supporting religions? What about for God's sake his *church*, was it getting along without him? How much reality was there in Leota's crazy conjecture about being hypnotized? And back to Was Leota safe?

The advantage of a head full of unsorted thoughts and problems was that it kept his mind off Yosper's interminable chatter.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Which went on as they moved between the great double-walled spheres of hydrogen, became louder as they cut between the thumping compressors that kept the hydrogen liquid, recessed briefly as they stood by the immense hot-air vents that roared 150-degree waste heat into the already sultry Italian sky—there was some risk that one of the not very alert fuel-depot guards might hear—and resumed full momentum in the Cadillac that Mario steered athletically along the waterfront, up through a tangle of climbing, narrow streets and into the parking lot of a huge hotel atop the Vomero. Hake was given twenty minutes to clean himself up, pat water on his bruises and change into fresh clothes out of the bags that Mario had obligingly brought from Capri, and then it was a reprise of the night before at *Il morte di pescadore*. They had, again, the best table in the house. It looked out over the Bay, with Vesuvius's cratered peak illuminated in red, white and green searchlights a dozen miles away, and Yosper was saying, "Veal, Hake! If you don't want fish, take veal; it's the only kind of meat the Italians understand, but they know it well." The pills that Leota had given him had long since worn off. His jaw and belly felt as though cattle had stampeded over them. He was exhausted—it had been a shock to him to find that it was still only nine o'clock at night by the time they reached the hotel—and he felt as though he were running a temperature. But the thing he was sickest of was the sound of Yosper's voice. The old man was engaged in a lengthy debate with the waiter on what proportion of Parmesan cheese should go into the softer base in his *Scallopine a la Vomero cordon blue,* and with the wine steward on whether the Lacrima Cristi really came from the vineyards on Mount Vesuvius, or was something their *bottegliere* cooked up out of grape husks and hydrochloric acid that afternoon.

Hake ordered at random, wanting nothing more than to get it over and get to bed—and, as soon as possible, back to Long Branch, New Jersey. When Yosper tried to guide him to a specialty of the house, he snarled, "Anything! I don't care. I didn't come here to spend the taxpayers' money on gin-mills!"

Yosper gave him a level stare and sent the waiter away. When he was gone, the old man said, "Hake, two things you should remember. First, you don't talk about working for the government when anybody you don't know is listening. Second, this isn't costing the taxpayers a dime. Not ours, anyway. Dieter, who are we sticking with this one?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I was going to use my Barclay card," the Dutch boy said. "It goes to KLM."

Yosper nodded, grinning. "That gets charged to the airline, who charge it to a special account that turns out to be unauditable funds for the Dutch spooks. There's no way they'll trace it to us. Let's see, on Capri I think we used the Banco di Milano credit, which goes through the Italian hydroelectric syndicate to their Air Force Intelligence. You know how to handle the computers, you can get anything you want—and the enemy pays for it! So eat hearty, boy. Every lira you spend takes one away from the other side."

He paused, and said to Dieter, "That reminds me. Will you check on that other matter?" The boy nodded and slipped away, as the waiter came back with platters of raw vegetables and antipasto.

Chewing the crunchy celery and hearts of palm turned out to be an ordeal for Hake. Half of his molars felt loose in their sockets, and protested the force of his jaw. He ate sullenly, doggedly, staring out across the gentle bay. With the festooned lights of the cruise ships at the docks, the cars along the waterfront, the distant villas on the Portici and Torre del Greco shore it was both lovely and awful—so terrible a waste of energy that he could not understand why it was tolerated, or how it failed to sink the Italian economy. To be sure, the farms and peasant villages were practicing stricter economies than anything in New Jersey, he knew. But that made this prodigious waste even more immoral. There was something very sick in the world he lived in. And if the healers, or the people who thought they were healing it, were all like Yosper, what hope was there for even survival? The old man was holding forth on religion again. It was God's plan for the world, he was saying, that the righteous should survive and conquer; and the words beat against Hake's inner thoughts confusingly. Then he did a double-take on a phrase of Yosper's and demanded, "What did you say?"

"You should pay attention," Mario said accusingly. "Yosper is a great man and he saved your life."

The old man patted Mario's arm tolerantly. "I was saying that I don't hold with Darwin."

Hake goggled. It was exactly as though he had said he thought the earth was flat. "But—but you just said you thought the fittest should survive."

"I said the righteous, Hake, but I'll agree it's the same thing.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

God gives us the strength to do His will. But that's nothing to do with your Darwin. It's against the Bible, so it's wrong; that's all there is to it. And," he added, warming up, "if you look at the whole picture with the eyes of understanding, you see it's against science, too! Real science, Hake. Common sense science. Darwin just doesn't add up. Heaven's name, boy, just open your eyes to the marvelous world we live in! Electric eels. Hummingbirds. Desert seeds that are smart enough to pay no attention to a shower, but sprout for a real rain—are you telling me that all happened by *chance*? No, boy. Your Mister Darwin just can't cut it. Just look at your own *eye*. Your Mister Darwin says some pollywog sixteen billion years ago started out with some scales on its skin that responded to light, am I correct? And am I supposed to believe that for all those years it just kept on trying to turn those scales into something that'll read a book, or watch a TV screen, and turn with the most beautifully designed muscles and nerves you ever saw, and weep, and magnify, and—why, your scientists can't even *build* a machine as sensitive as the human eye! And you want me to believe all that happened by chance, starting from some fish's scales? That's as crazy as—wait a minute."

Dieter had come back, followed by a waiter bearing a telephone. While the instrument was being plugged in, the Dutch boy whispered in Yosper's ear. "Uh-huh," said Yosper, looking satisfied. "Well, let's drop this argument, as it's making our friend uncomfortable. I think that wine's breathed about long enough now; let's get the waiter to pour it."

Hake shook his head unbelievingly. But what was the use? His chicken marsala was arriving; he waited impatiently for the waiter to finish boning it before his eyes, and then ate swiftly. "I don't want any dessert," he said, finished while the others were still savoring the best parts of their meals. "I think I'll go to bed."

"Sure," said Yosper hospitably. "You've had a rough day. Let's get straight about tomorrow, though. You're on an 8:00 AM flight to Leonardo da Vinci. When you get there, go in to the depot in Rome, the place where you got your clothes on the way down here. They'll fix you up with the right documents and tickets; I think it's a 2:00 PM flight to New York—you'll sleep tomorrow night in your own bed—but they'll straighten all that out for you. Leave a call for six. Mario'll pick you up at six-thirty and take you to the airport."

"I will have a coffee sent up to you before we leave," Mario said agreeably. "If you wish something more before your flight, we can


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get it after you check in at Capodichino."

Hake stood listening. And fidgeting. His instincts wanted to say something his mouth was reluctant to speak. Finally he managed to say, "Anyway, thank you. All of you. I guess you did get me out of a tight place."

"No more than was coming to you, dear boy. You were a great help to us. Your nut-lady and the wogs were a considerable annoyance, and now they're taken care of."

"But they got away!"

"The wogs did, yes. But that's not all bad, Hake. They are an unpleasant pair, and catching them is like catching rattlesnakes in a net. Besides, dear boy, it's nothing *personal* with them. I didn't want to punish them. You don't punish a bomb, you just make sure it doesn't blow you up."

They were all smiling at him, Yosper still eating, the boys leaned back and holding hands. Hake waited for the other shoe to drop. It didn't. He said tightly, "The girl got away too."

"Not far, boy," said Yosper pleasantly.

"What are you talking about?"

Yosper sighed. "Well, let's see if we can find out," he said, and picked up the phone. He spoke for a few seconds in a language Hake did not know and then put it down, beaming. "She's in Regina Coeli right now, Hake. She'll be out of circulation for a while."

"Jail? For what? She didn't break any law here!"

Yosper shook his head, chuckling. "She broke the most basic law of the land. You see, her little bunch of amateurs does the same trick we do, only they're not as good at it. She was operating on forged identity and credit. But once we tracked her down to the *Pescadore* and dear Mario turned her room—why, we knew what she was using. The rest of it was easy. We blew her credit. She got as far as Rome, and they picked her up for using phony cards. She's a bankrupt, Hake. They'll auction her off to pay her bills. It'll be a good long time before she bothers us again."

Twenty-one hours later Hake got out of a taxi on the Trastevere side of the Ponte Sant Angelo. He had not wasted his time in Rome. The training under the wire, and the on-the-job skills he had acquired in the last few days, had all found a use. From the Agency's safe depot in Rome he had secured his new passport and his return ticket to America, along with a few items of standard equipment he had requisitioned on the spot—one of them being



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the inks and papers to change his ticket, and the cards to finance a few extracurricular activities. The rest of the day had been spent finding out what he needed to know. He set his walking stick and "satchel" on the sidewalk under the looming layer-cake of Hadrian's Tomb and paid the driver carefully, adding coins according to volume and pitch. When the words dwindled away and the tone reached baritone he turned away, picked up his gear and crossed to the parapet near the bridge. The Tiber River at that point was a gently meandering stream, between grassy banks, here widening into a pool, there narrow and swift. It did not look artificial. It looked as though it had been there forever.

"*Siete pescadore?*" Hake had not noticed the approach of the Roman policeman. "*Pesce*," the man repeated, demonstrating a rod and line with his electric baton. "Feesh? You feesh? Have license?"

"Oh," said Hake, enlightened. "No, I'm not going to fish. No fish. Just look. *Voyeur.*"

"Ah, *paura*!" said the patrolman in sympathy, touching Hake's shoulder before moving on. Hake leaned idly on the balustrade, giving him time to get out of sight. It was true, what he had been talking about. There were anglers on the Ponte Sant Angelo, dangling hooks into the stream as it flowed under the bridge, even at this hour. And in the stream itself, elderly women in hip-length waders were whipping the shallows with fly rods. Hake could not see whether they were catching anything. But he wished them luck, for it took their attention off him.

He walked quickly twenty yards out onto the bridge and there, just as the map had said, there was an iron disk set in the sidewalk. Using the walking stick as a crowbar he levered the cover off and peered in. It was totally dark, and it stank. That was as expected, too, if not very attractive. He dropped the knapsack in and heard it hit a cement landing a few yards down; he followed, climbing down a slippery metal ladder and lowering the cover back into place above him.

As soon as it was closed the stench became abominable, and the absence of light was total.

He was in Rome's greatest and oldest sewer. Was the Tiber polluted? *Va bene!* Roof it over. Let it fulfill its function! And now the river was in fact a sewer. It rolled under a grassed and gardened parkland strip with a new, and artificial, stream running its length to justify the maps and the bridges. Waste disposal was benefited. Aesthetic appeal was maintained. And *la cloaca mas-*


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*sima nuova* flowed untroubled to the sea.

Untroubled? Yes, perhaps, but not untroubling. The stink was at least an order of magnitude worse than anything Hake had previously experienced in his life. Hastily he fumbled around on the slimy cement to find the knapsack, located the ripcord and popped it open. It made a sharp rush of sound, like a tire abruptly going flat and unfolded itself. In ten seconds it had sprouted prow and stern, stretching itself into the form of a kayak. He fumbled around to orient himself and found what he was looking for. Inside the well for the paddler was a plastic pouch which, opened, produced flashlight, folded paddle, and a breathing mask.

When Hake had the mask on, he took the first full breath he had allowed himself since entering the manhole. It was bearable. Barely bearable. It was like being down-wind of an ill-kept abattoir, where before it had been like being one of the beeves.

He thumbed the light on and looked about him. The Tiber water did not look bad. Things were floating in it, and the stench was undeniable, but it looked, actually, merely cool and wet—until he held the light at arm's-length out away from the cement landing, and saw the oily iridescence shining up. The roof was steelwork with a courtesy patching of plaster, most of which had peeled away. Under it the river moved more briskly than it appeared. When Hake was in the kayak he found that paddling was hard work.

It would have been intelligent, he realized, to have let himself in upstream of his destination, rather than down. He had not been that intelligent. Each stroke moved him a yard forward, and while he was bringing the paddle up for the next stroke the current slid him a foot back. It was complicated by the need to change sides from time to time, and still more by the fact that he had to use care; he did not want the sewer sloshing over into the kayak, because the smell would be certain to make him conspicuous where he was going. Even so, he could not avoid a certain amount of dripping. Within a minute he had begun to sweat, and no more than two or three minutes later he was panting for breath. If there had been anything to Leota's talk about hypnotism, he thought grimly, he could have used a little of the trance state now. Anything—anything that would take his mind off the smell, and the heat, and the fatigue that was beginning to burn his already sore muscles.

He had expected it to take ten minutes to paddle the four hundred yards up the underground Tiber. It took half an hour,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and by the time he found the landing he was looking for he was spent. Stench or none, he pulled the mask off to allow his lungs more air.

But he was there. He was under the great pavilion that had been built to straddle the river, for music and dance. And if his information was correct, Leota was somewhere overhead.

There was a lock on the door but once again the training under the wire proved itself. He was through it in a minute, emerging into a steel-staired cement shaft. After climbing six short flights he found a door and, opening it quickly, slipped through.

He was in a round chamber, not very large, that looked like a surgical amphitheater. The center was a sort of pit, like an orchestra hall set up for a pops concert. It was surrounded by circular, rising tiers of benches; and for some reason it looked reminiscent. But not familiar. Scattered around the pit were cloth-draped wooden stands, like the ones animal trainers use to put their lions through their paces, but they were not occupied. He had cut it close, but the auction had not yet begun. A few dozen persons were strolling about the pit, others seated on the benches above. Waiters in smoking jackets and waitresses in tiny cocktail skirts were passing among them with trays of wine and orange juice, and no one had observed him as he entered. He reached for a glass at random and realized what non-memory had been trying to assert itself as he tasted the orange. The place was exactly as he had imagined Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to be. A woman in a long dress and corsage approached him. *"Una carta, signore?"* He took the program and thanked her, and then, when it appeared more was expected, gave her a hundred-lire tip. She was looking at him curiously, and he turned away as though urgently in need of a place to set down his orange-juice glass.

Half of the crowd on the floor seemed to be Western businessperson types, both male and female. The others wore burnooses, a few dashikis, and Hake caught phrases of old, familiar tongues. He did not pause to listen. He felt out of place, and was anxious to avoid attracting attention. The sunglasses covered his two still black eyes, but the bruises on his face were visible and he was aware that he carried with him a faint smell of the sewer. He was also younger than almost any of the other men, and far less expensively dressed. But as he looked closer he revised his opinion. It would not be easy to be out of place in this group, they were too disparate among themselves. The sheikhs were not all Arab, and probably not sheikhs. Hake recognized Bedouin and Turk as well


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the familiar Palestinian and Lebanese of his childhood. Some of them were black, and broader-featured than any of those—perhaps Soudanese, perhaps anything at all. Or anything that had money. That was the unifying characteristic of them all, whether they wore burnoose or open-necked sports shirt, or, like the woman who snapped at Hake in French when he bumped into her, a velvet pants suit. Some of them were worse dressed than Hake. But there was about them an air that said that, if so, it was because they chose to be; and they all had the look of persons who acquired what they liked.

Hake reached out for another glass—this time making sure that it was wine, not a fruit juice, that it contained—and retired to the edge of the pit to study the *carta*. It was not exactly a program. It was more like a catalogue. A soft, matte-paper cover enclosed a four-page, neatly photocopied listing of the fifteen indentured credit-fraud criminals who were to be sold off that evening.

He had taken an Italian-language copy of the insert, which perhaps was why the program-vender had looked at him that way. Leota's name was not on the list. Well, of course, it wouldn't be. He searched carefully and decided that *Joanna Sailtops, signorina di 26 anni, degli Stati-Uniti, L2 265 000* must be she. And if the two-million-lire figure represented her selling price, it would be well within the limits of the credit cards he had forged.

There was nothing else in the insert that seemed helpful, but inside the matte cover was some material repreated in eight languages, French and German and Japanese, but also in English and Arabic. They all said the same thing, and were descriptions of the conditions of sale. Each of these persons had pleaded guilty to credit fraud and accepted indentured service in lieu of prison terms. Proceeds of sale would go to repay the losses sustained, and to post bonds; a percentage was deducted to cover the expenses of the State in the conduct of the trial and the auction. Each person was fully guaranteed against any permanent damage. Each had been given a full medical examination that afternoon and the records would be kept; a similar examination would be performed upon conclusion of the term of service, and if any lasting harm had been inflicted, the indentured person would have the right of suing for damages, as well as a possible criminal action against the purchaser. It was not quite slavery, Hake conceded to himself. But close enough, close enough!

He looked up. Something was happening. The prospective buyers who had seated themselves were leaving the benches and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

coming down into the pit, and in a moment he saw why. Attendants in the smoking jackets of waiters were leading in a procession of persons wearing thin cloaks and *i minimi*. The subjects of the auction. And the fifth one to enter was Leota.

The costume that had seemed a little extreme, but highly attractive, in the Blue Grotto struck Hake as appallingly scanty here. Even covered by the clinging, but nearly transparent, cloak. Hake did not like the way the other customers looked at her—they were not all studying her, to be sure, but even the fact that the other fourteen items of merchandise drew attention, some of them a good deal more than Leota, seemed to him demeaning. He pushed his way past a cocktail waitress and a slight, dark man in kepi and a tailored short-suit to reach her. Her eyes widened.

"Hake! Get the hell out of here!"

He shook his head. "I'm going to get you out. I'll pay your bill—"

"Piss off!" she hissed, staring around. On the covered drum nearest hers one of the attendants was demonstrating the muscles of a teen-aged peasant boy with macho gill-wattles carved into his neck. Only the Arab in shorts was watching them. And he was smiling. The fact that Leota had a friend present made her more interesting, Hake realized angrily. She leaned close and whispered, "You can't afford this. And I'll be all right. If you want to do something to help, remember what we were talking about on the ship."

"I remember. But I'm going to buy you free, Leota. I've got the, ah, the price."

"Idiot! You use phony credit and you'll find yourself up here too! Horny, you can be so *stupid*. If I go out of here with you, how long do you think it'll be before your buddies come after me?"

While he was trying to think of an answer to that, she added: "It's only going to be thirty days or so. They bid on per-diem contracts, and I ought to be good for six or seven hundred thousand lire a day." She glanced at the Saudi, who was strolling closer, studying the shape of her body under the cape. "Now get lost! I—I appreciate the thought, Horny, but I don't need your help. I'll be a lot safer if some pasta manufacturer takes me home for a while, until things cool off."

"Excuse me," said the Saudi politely, moving past Hake to peer into Leota's face.

Hake felt himself trembling. The notion of Leota being sold



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into—into what was, after all, prostitution! like some Minneapolis teen-ager shagged into the stable of a Times Square pimp!—stung him in nerves he had not known he possessed. He was conscious of an unusual squirming in his groin. It was not figurative, but a physical fact, as though his testicles were responding to the threat to his manhood by trying to creep up out of sight. And at the same time he was conscious of a strong desire to punch the Arab out.

And all this was as astonishing to Hake as it was unpleasant, because he had never known himself as a beau-gallant. I'm a God-damned *anachronism,* one part of his mind was telling another, I belong in the court of Aquitaine! And quite separately, another piece of his mind—or perhaps a piece of Horny Hake that lived nowhere near his mind—tensed the muscles and worked the tendons and moved the joints that stiff-armed the Saudi, grabbed Leota by the arm and dragged her across the clearing floor, toward the exit—The exit where one of the attendants was picking up a phone, while three others moved menacingly toward him. One caught at each of Hake's arms. The third shook a fist, hissing furiously in Italian. From behind, something struck Hake's shoulder; he craned his neck, and saw that it was the Saudi, thin lips pouting under the raptor nose, ivory swagger-stick raised to hit him again. One of the attendants moved diplomatically between them. The Arab drew back, suspending the attack in preference to being touched, and declared in particulate Oxonian English, "This common creature—has had the impudence—to ruffianize me."

"I didn't!" The attendant twisted his arm, but Hake blazed, "He's lying! At most, I brushed him aside!"

"I suggest—" shrilled the Arab"—that we permit the authorities—to deal with this gangster!" And it was only then that Hake saw that a pair of carabinieri had appeared behind the attendants. One of them, whom Hake had somehow seen before, was speaking sorrowfully and judgmentally in Italian, while the attendants nodded.

"He says," translated the other policeman, "that you have already confessed yourself to be a sexual pervert—do you deny it? for shame!—a voyeur! And you trespass here."

Hake's diminishing rational self possessed enough jurisdiction still to cause him to say, quite reasonably, "I see there may be some sort of misunderstanding here." But at the same time the non-rational one was swelling against thinning control. The Arab thoughtfully lifted his swagger stick again. Analytically, Hake


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might have perceived that it was unlikely he meant to strike. Why should he? Right was on his side, along with the majesty of the law. Analytical Hake was not involved. Glandular Hake and machismatic Hake and the ensorceled Aquitainian Hake outnumbered and overwhelmed the analytical one. He flung the policeman's arms away. Alarmed, the Saudi struck at him with the baton while his other hand went instinctively to the hilt of the ceremonial dagger at his belt.

And, of course, beyond question the Arab would not use it to kill. And when Hake instinctively grabbed for the dagger and it came away into his astonished hand, he would not have used it to kill either. But reflexive Hake did not know the first, nor reflexive Arab, police and attendants the second; and all at once he was the very picture of mad pervert at bay with naked blade in his hand. "Oh, Horny!" wailed Leota's voice, "you should have listened—" And they all moved in at once, and clubbed him to the ground.

## V.

"When I was a ballsy boy like you," said Yosper, swirling the whisky around his glass as they waited for Hake's plane, "I was as shit-stupid as you are, or, no, not that stupid, but stupid enough. I could've aced myself over any dumb, dirty pretty-puss that lifted a leg on my fireplug, same's you. 'Course, I didn't. Even then, I had some smarts. But I could have, yes." And it was as though they were playing the same scenes all over again. The sets were a little different; they were in the sky lounge at the Rome airport instead of a Vomero restaurant or Capri night club or Munich pension. But the actors were the same, and playing the same parts. Only the one supporting actor who was Hake himself was made up in a different way: he had a compression bandage over his left ear to protect the new stitches that held it on. The rest—the black eyes, bruised jaws, the stiff and uneasy way he moved—they were the equivalent of the lettering on an easeled poster, *Some Time Later*, which himself did enact. But the play was all reprise, Yosper's monologue attended by the chorus, brave Mario, sweet Dieter, even laughing Carlos, who had just flown in from heaven knew where, to join Yosper for heaven knew what. "—of course, there are some brutes that I personally would not touch with a borrowed, ah, thing. Not now. Not even when I was


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a great deal younger than you, Hake, and almost as dumb. Were you balling her?"

Hake glared at him through swollen eyes. The old man waved a hand. "I guess you were, and you got your *cojones* misplaced to where your brains belong. Foul, foolish business, Hake, but it's happened to better men than you, and I won't hold it against you. Looks like you're home free. Not counting a few aches and pains, of course. The cops dropped charges, fair enough; figured they got their jollies kicking you around on the way to the *questura*. So there's nothing on the record, and won't be unless you pissed the sheikh off worse'n I think you did. But that I doubt, because he's gone. So—no report, no problem. The boys and I won't say anything. And, man! You're some mean hand at a bar-room brawl, Hake, you know that? Seven against one, and you wade right in! Wouldn't've thought it of you."

"Stop now," Hake said clearly.

Yosper was brought down, disconcerted, in full flow. "What?"

"I said stop for a minute. Please," he added, pro forma. "I want to know what happened to Leota."

"Why, she's gone, Hake. The Sheikh of Araby took off for his desert tent off in the Sahel or someplace, and naturally he took her along to give him what he wants. You know," he said scientifically, "from what I hear, those sheikhs want some freaky fixin's when they go to it. Too bad you can't ask her about it sometime, Hake. Be interesting to learn something, you know?"

*"Yosper, God damn you—"*

Around the table the three young men shifted position slightly, without either menace or anger, simply entering the 'ready' mode. Yosper raised his hand. "Hake here isn't going to do anything, are you, Hake? No. You shouldn't take the name of the Lord in vain. But He's got as much sense as I have, and He knows you're just pissed off." He paused for a second, looking at Hake with sharp blue eyes that, for a wonder, had something in them Hake could only recognize as compassion. "Get over it, boy," he said. "You'll never see her again. And now," he said, glancing at his watch, "it's about that time. Drink up, and we'll get Mr. Hake here on his big white bird."

As they walked through the perfunctory passport control Hake's anger was cooling. His body hurt all over, from two quite thorough beatings in two days, but the interior pain that had led him to fury was going away. Or changing: from rage to resolution, from a blind desire to strike out to a calculating resolve to plan.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At the gate, the three youths solemnly stepped up in turn to shake Hake's hand. Yosper had the last word. "You're a good man, Hake. Little headstrong, but that's a good thing. I'm putting through a commendation for you. And if I ever have a big job you can help in, I'm going to ask for you by name."

Strapping himself in, Hake could not remember whether or not he had said "thank you." It was not important. What was important was that Leota had been right. He was being groomed for more complicated jobs, and moving up in the trust of the Agency. As the jet launched itself out over the Tyrrhenian Sea and the beaches at Ostia fell away below them, the interior resolution in Hake's heart was coldly clarifying itself. It was good that he was trusted; having trust meant having the power to betray.

**Special Introductory Subscription To**
**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

For the first time, new readers are offered this shortest-term, get-acquainted subscription to one of the most entertaining magazines in the mystery field.

No one but the Master of Suspense guarantees you so many unnerving and delightful hours of suspenseful reading!

☐ Bill me $5.97 for 5 issues.

☐ Enclosed is $5.97
(Outside U.S.A. & poss., $6.82)

I prefer to use my MASTER CHARGE or VISA credit card; however, only longer terms are available:

☐ Send me 14 issues for ONLY $13.97 (outside USA $16.35)

Credit card # | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Expiration date _____ Signature _____

NAME _____ (Please print)

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Box 2640 Greenwich, CT 06835**

Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first copy. H9G033




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Classified MARKET

ISAAC ASIMOV—is published monthly. The rate per word for CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS is $1.00—payable in advance—minimum ad $15.00. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

## ADDITIONAL INCOME

$300-$900 possible weekly! Work at home, own hours. Specify stuffing envelopes or wholesale merchandise. Self-addressed stamped envelope and 25¢ Details. J. Lyon, Dept.-M, 211 E. 12th, Lawson, MO 64062.

## ADVERTISING SERVICES

FREE ADVERTISING! Your 1 inch ad on 100,000 circulars and Mailed Free. Complete Details for $1.00. Taco, Box 12956, St. Louis, MO 63141.

## AUTHOR'S SERVICE

WRITERS! Literary Agency needs stories, articles, books! Saleable manuscripts bring $100-$5,000. Requirement brochure—25¢. Meyer, 615 East Benton (#8), Aurora, Illinois 60505.

## AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

NEW Car Free Yearly! Details! Supercar, Box 28101, St. Louis, MO 63119.

GASOLINE MILEAGE INCREASED 50%, horsepower 5-10% by our simplified retuning methods. DETAILS FREE! Techneering, Box 1688SD, Columbia, MO 65201.

## BIG MAIL

BIG Mail 50¢. Big mail and a gift $1.00. Sam, P.O. Box 148, Opa Loca, Fla. 33054.

## BLUEPRINTS, PATTERNS & PLANS

NEW CRAFT PRINT CATALOG—Choose from over 100 great easy-to-build plans. Send $1.25 (completely refunded with your first order). BOAT BUILDER, (CP Div.)—380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

PERRY RHODAN NEW RELEASES AVAILABLE NOW! #119 through 130, $18. #131 through 136, $9. #119 through 136, $25. Send check, money order to: KRIS DARKON, 2495 Glendower Ave., Los Angeles, California 90027.

SF BOOKS and Magazines. Lists Free. David Jauvtis, 6 Sala Court, Spring Valley, NY 10977.

DO YOU KNOW "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls"? Booklet plus a $2.00 certificate toward a classified ad in any of our publications tells how. Send $1.75 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

THE SCIENCE FICTION SHOP, 56 Eighth Ave., N.Y., NY 10014. Virtually everything in print, and much that isn't. FREE catalogue.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

100% PROFIT Bronzing Baby Shoes. Free Literature. NBC, Box 1904-DG, Sebring, FL 33870.

$1200.00 MONTHLY CORRECTING PUPIL'S LESSONS!!! Start Immediately. Free Report. Send self-addressed stamped envelope. Home, Box 9201-SBBP, San Diego, CA 92109.

$350 Weekly Mailing Letters. Free Details. Bronxville House, Box 311-D, Bronxville, NY 10708.

MONEY Making Business. It's profitable and fun. Free details. The Globus Co., P.O. Box 443, D-C5, Bartlett, IL 60103.

STAY HOME! EARN BIG MONEY addressing envelopes. Genuine offer 10¢. Lindco, 3636-DA, Peterson, Chicago 60659.

WHOLESALE Rubber Stamp Outfits, Supplies. Catalog $1.00. Martin, 1432D Major, Jefferson City, MO 65101.

$300.00 WEEKLY, Mailing Circulars. Write: McGuire, Box 91054, Tacoma, WA 98491.

HUGE PROFITS Selling Information by Mail. Complete instructions $1.00. Frank, Box 8332, Charlotte, NC 28208.

MAILORDER opportunity! Start profitable home business without experience or capital. Write for free book and details. No obligation. Gil Turk, Dept. 11, Montvale, NJ 07645.

MAKE $1.00 Each Addressing Envelopes. We pay postage. No Limit. Beginners Kit $2.00. Colossi, Box 318-D, Brooklyn, NY 11204.

$356.00 WEEKLY GUARANTEED. Work two hours daily at home ($178.00 for one hour). Free Brochure. FAS, Box 13703, Santx, 78213.

FREE CATALOG—Make Huge Profits Easy—Wholesaling Gifts, Novelties. Write Now: Newberry, Box 1294-A589, Seguin, Texas 78155.

$500.00 WEEKLY MAILING CIRCULARS! NEW GUARANTEED PROGRAM! FREE PROOF: McMahon, Box 909-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14303.

$480 Weekly Possible. Amazing New Mailing Program. Details, Rasmussen DP89, 1747N. 450E., Ogden, Utah 84404.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Classified PLACE

To be included in the next issue, please send order and remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN Extra Money in your spare time mailing commission circulars. Rush self-addressed stamped envelope for Free details: Laksmi's (D879), Box 6298, Cleveland, OH 44101.

$1,000.00/Thousand Stuffing Envelopes. Send S.A.S.E to Paper Works Box 31691-B1, Phoenix, Arizona 85046.

$58.90 Tomorrow, $353.88 Next Week. Guaranteed. Free Report. AAHIP, Unit 29309, Medcensta, TX 78229.

EARN $500/Thousand Weekly—stuffing envelopes—easy homework. Free supplies—start immediately! Rush self-addressed stamped envelope: Laksmi's (D879), Box 6298, Cleveland, OH 44101.

YOUR NAME IN PRINT. You should be a part of AMERICAN VOICE being published by Vanstead's. Send your signed original poem idea or short story (one page) with $25 to Vanstead's, 303 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016. You will receive copy for your bookshelve and 10% of sales.

$480.00 WEEKLY! "Guaranteed Home Mailing Program." Freedom, Box 30224-DP, Denver, Colorado 80230.

AMAZING Profit! Home Gift Shop! Information! Charles Pollard, 27 Snowhill, Agincourt, Ontario M1S 3T4.

"999 Successful Little Known Businesses." Work Home. Stamp for details. Ron Smith, Box 881, Port Heuneme, CA 93041.

$500/Thousand stuffing envelopes, free supplies. Rush stamped, addressed envelope: L&M Kellander, Box 25, Talmage, PA 17580.

## BUY IT WHOLESALE

JEWELRY Sample and Price Information, $1.00. K&M Distributor, Fiskeville, RI 02823.

SAVE MONEY! Buy low cost items. 5 catalogs $4.00. World Directory $3.00. International Directory $3. 1001 Things Free $2.00. All (8) $10.00. Winchester Enterprises, Inc., 2807BC Hargrave Street, Phila., PA 19136.

BEAT INFLATION! Buy used cars BELOW WHOLESALE! Secrets revealed! Complete special report $3.95. JTB Research, P.O. Box 871, Dept. 5G, Hobe Sound, FL 33455.

## DO IT YOURSELF

GAS Shortage. Not if you burn gasohol, even make your own alcohol. Facts $2. Witke, Box 331, Oklawaha, FL 32679.

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D.s . . . Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-IA-8, Tustin, CA 92680.

COLLEGE DEGREES for Life & Work Experiences. Bachelors, Masters, Doctorial Programs. Free information, write American International University, 150 South Los Robles, Dept. AU-8, Pasadena, CA 91101. Call toll-free 1-800-423-4166.

GET advice on how to economize in modernizing or improving or adding space from idea to completion for your home. Working blueprints available. Send $1.50 for 110 Better Building Plans to: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

COLLEGE degree by mail, via resume Education, 256D South Robertson, Beverly Hills, CA 90211.

## FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITIES

WEALTH—Independence—Security. Be your own Auto Related Publisher of a nationally accepted bi-monthly shopper. For complete details and package program, send $10.00 (Refundable) to The Motor Mart Shopper, Inc., Suite 212, C. L. Cutliff Bldg., Bowling Green, KY 42101. "The New Concept In Advertising"

## GIFTS THAT PLEASE

FREE GIFT catalog! UNIQUE gifts from around the world. Gifts, Box 11588-IA, Spokane, WA 99211.

## HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

## LOANS BY MAIL

GET cash grants—from Government. (Never repay.) Also, cash loans available. All ages eligible. Complete information, $2 (refundable). Institutional Funds-DG, 1629 K. St. NW, #502, Washington, D.C. 20009.

## MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY . . . NEW WAY, TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 859DP, ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Classified Continued

## MISCELLANEOUS

SAVE Gasoline! Government Patented Fuel Saver! Fits Cars, Trucks! Easily Installed Yourself! Rush Sase For Details. Supersales DP3, 3202 23rd, Lubbock, Texas 79410.

$50.00 interest free. Send sase: M & B Assoc., P.O. Box 206, King of Prussia, PA 19406.

NEW device conquers Body Discomfort. Free Details, Zeldco, Box 11155, Santa Ana, 92711.

ENTER CANADA'S FABULOUS LOTTERY. Details: Joe Davis, #15-5763 Oak, Vancouver, Canada V6M 2V7.

SPENDING too much time cooking when camping? Tired of burgers, dogs, beans? Hot hearty meals in minutes! Tips, recipes, $2.25 postpaid. CAMPERS MEALS, 29242 Edgewood Rd., San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$500 WEEKLY! FANTASTIC HOME MAIL-ORDER PROFITS! (DEALERS WANTED) GRAHAMCO DPBX, 99371 TACOMA, WA 98499.

HOMEWORKERS Needed! $600 weekly addressing, mailing. Ideal for students. Box 1874, Htfd., CT 06144.

$300 WEEKLY SPARE TIME — Mailing Salesletters. Details, Thomas, Dept.-D, Box 11773, Charlotte, NC 28220.

$3,000.00 Per WEEK Floods My Mailbox!!! How about yours? Free booklet tells all. Rexson 10-04, Box 1060, Orangepark, FL 32073.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send $1.50 (plus 25¢ postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

EASY HOMEWORK PLAN. Stuff circulars. Big $$$. Write: A&I, 5343-A Diamond Hts., San Francisco, CA 94131.

$4,500 Weekly posisble. Guarantee. Free Brochure. Dept. CMB, P.O. Box 1175-I, Pinellas Park, FL 33565.

INCREASE Your Money Status, Five Reports. $3.00: Bonus Moneysaver Newsletter. Chesapeake, Box 6557-K, Portsmouth, VA 23703.

$3,000.00 Per WEEK Floods My Mailbox!!! How about yours? Free booklet tells all. Rexson 15-20, Box 1060, Orangepark, FL 32073.

$250.00 Profit per thousand possible Mailing Circulars!! Offer-Details: Stamped Addressed Envelope. Worldwide-ADVS, X15940, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33318.

$2000.00 Monthly Possible Stuffing Envelopes! Details, send stamped self-addressed envelope. Craft, Box 3419DA, Mission Viejo, CA 92690.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

LOTS of MONEY can be made honestly on your own time and initiative as percentage FUND RAISER for nonprofit corporation aiding widows. Details, instructions and registration card. Send 3 dollars. FLS, Inc., 802 Waldo, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501.

AMAZING! $256,000 yearly with classified ads. Free Proof. Moneycraft, 2361 Dale IO, Ceres, CA 95307.

MAKE EXTRA MONEY in your spare time. Report tells how. Rush $2: Spectron Company, Dept. A, 420 E. 111 St., Suite 2908, New York, NY 10029.

$55,000 in three weeks guaranteed! Send sase: M & B Assoc., P.O. Box 206, King of Prussia, PA 19406.

BIG MONEY WITH TROPICAL SEEDS. Forty New Varieties. Write: Decorative Products, 825 East Belmont, Fresno, CA 93701.

## PEN PALS

FREE service ages 16 and above. For information: Friends Worldwide, CP-95/F Anjou, Montreal, Canada H1K 4G2.

## PERSONAL

BECOME a minister and start a tax exempt church. Details, Obispo Universal Life Church, Box 58, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693.

## PHOTOGRAPHY—PHOTO FINISHING & SUPPLIES

SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!!! Make your own S & M Densitometer. Send $3.00 for detailed drawings and instructions. A must for successful photography in your darkroom. Order direct: S & M Instruments, Dept. IA8, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., NY 10017.

## PRINTING, MIMEOGRAPHING & MULTIGRAPHING

2-COLOR RETIREMENT "BUSINESS" CARDS: $3.00 hundred postpaid. Bailey's Printshop, Whitefield, Maine 04362.

## RUBBER STAMPS

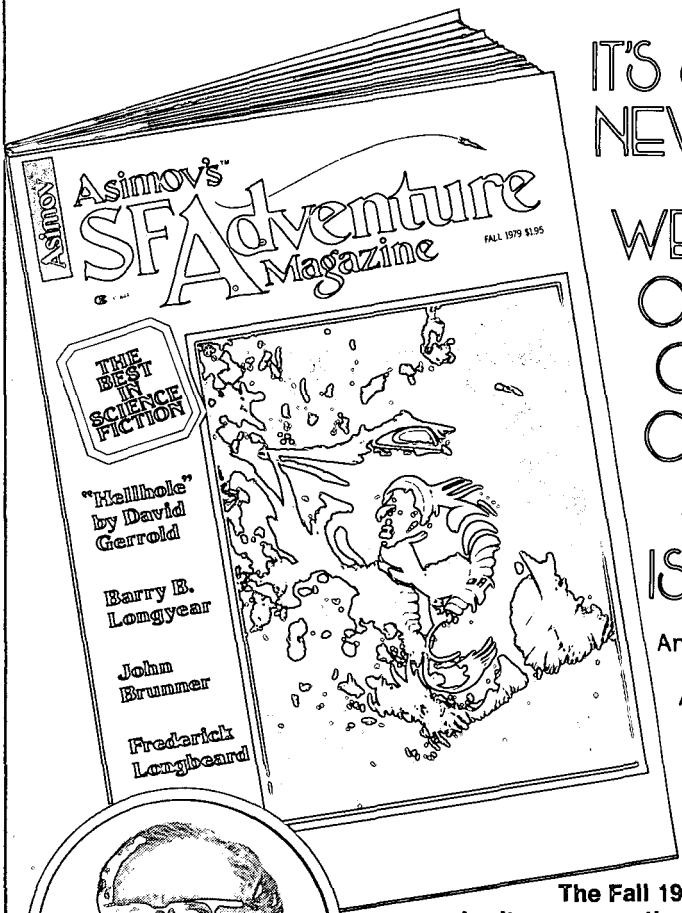
PERSONALIZED Rubber Stamp. 3 lines $2.95. Stampco, Dept. A-79, Box 41201, Sacramento, CA 95841.

## TIPS FOR THE HOME, ETC.

FOR anyone who wants the satisfaction and economy of repairing, furnishing and maintaining the furniture in his home. Send $1.50 (includes postage) to FURNITURE, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.



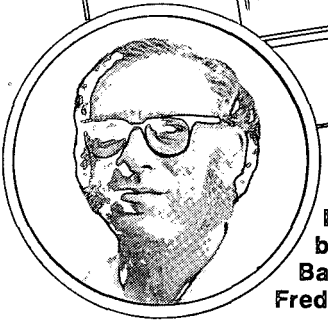
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




# IT'S SO NEW—

# WE'RE ONLY ON OUR 4TH ISSUE!

And when it's by Isaac Asimov it's just got to be lots of SF adventure and fun.



**The Fall 1979 Edition**—In it, among other exciting things, you'll enjoy "The Things That Are Gods," (a tale of the Traveller in Black) by John Brunner; "Hellhole," by David Gerrold; "The Starshow," by Barry B. Longyear; and "The Jaren," by Frederick Longbeard.

**Please use order coupon on Page 18.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# MUSIC TO READ SF BY

Music guaranteed to send the imagination soaring. Music to take you into the same exciting new dimensions of time and space offered by writers like Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke. Including film scores from such movies as *Fahrenheit 451*, this superb stereo recording is a $4.95 value. Now it is available exclusively to members of The Science Fiction Book Club at a big 40% saving – yours for just $2.95 when you join.

### How the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your introductory package of 4 books for just 10¢ plus shipping and handling. (If you also want the record, check the appropriate box in the coupon below.) If not completely satisfied, you may return them within ten days – membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. If you want both Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you don't want a Selection, or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided, and return it by the date specified. We allow you at least ten days for making your decision. If you don't get the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive unwanted books, you may return them at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. At least one of the two Selections each month is only $2.49. Other Selections are slightly higher but always much less than Publishers' Editions. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money. But do send the coupon today.

## ANY 4 BOOKS FOR 10¢ with membership

**BONUS:** Also take, if you wish, this $4.95 record value – now available exclusively to club members for just $2.95!

0075 **The Chronicles of Amber.** By Roger Zelazny. At last — the Amber series is complete! Two glorious volumes contain: **Nine Princes in Amber; The Guns of Avalon; Sign of the Unicorn; The Hand of Oberon; The Courts of Chaos.** Comb. pub. ed. $30.30

4697 **The Fountains of Paradise.** By Arthur C. Clarke. Important new novel by one of the superstars of science fiction. Pub. ed. $10.00

2543 ***The Dragonriders of Pern.*** By Anne McCaffrey. A mammoth volume containing all three novels: **Dragonflight, Dragonquest** and **The White Dragon.** Comb. pub. ed. $26.85

5207 **Titan:** By John Varley. When a ship is snatched from space, the crew finds itself in an alien world – *inside* another space ship. **Explicit sexual content may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $9.95

4721 **Brother to Demons, Brother to Gods.** By Jack Williamson. Humans may become extinct – supplanted by races they created themselves! Pub. ed. $10.00

1040 **The Avatar.** By Poul Anderson. Daring men and women brave the unknown potentials of an alien transport machine — and discover more than expected! Pub. ed. $10.95

7831 **Galactic Empires.** Brian Aldiss, ed. Two-volume anthology of 26 stories by famous authors Clarke, Asimov and others covers the Rise and Fall of Galactic Empires. Comb. pub. ed. $17.90

4945 **Leviathan's Deep.** By Jayge Carr. When another race tries to use a Terran in their power play, the Terrans take a hand in the game. **Explicit sexual content may be offensive to some.** Pub. ed. $8.95

4754 **The Book of Morgaine.** By C.J. Cherryh. Exciting 3-in-1 volume contains **Gate of Ivrel, Well of Shiuan,** and **Fires of Azeroth.** Special edition.

6221 **The Foundation Trilogy.** By Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to *barbarism.* An SF classic. Comb. pub. ed. $20.85

8532 **The Hugo Winners, Vol. I & II.** Giant 2-in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. $15.45

4523 **Stardance.** By Spider and Jeanne Robinson. A dancer's art opens the way to communication with aliens. Pub. ed. $8.95

## Science Fiction Book Club

Dept. **XR-098** Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad, will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices during the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. SFBC books are selections for mature readers.

☐ Send me, in addition, GREAT SCIENCE FICTION FILM MUSIC and bill me just $2.95 plus shipping and handling.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss _____ Please print

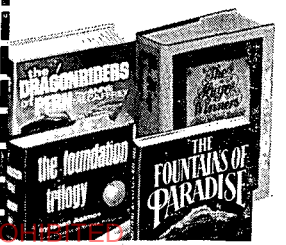
Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

*Order not valid without signature. If under 18, parent must sign.*

*The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.*

51-S140




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED